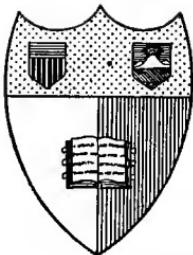


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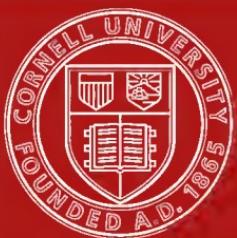
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## **ITALY IN NORTH AFRICA**







OLD TRIPOLI—IN THE MOHAMMEDAN QUARTER



# ITALY IN NORTH AFRICA

An Account of the Tripoli Enterprise

BY

W. K. MCCLURE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS  
AND MAPS

LONDON  
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## P R E F A C E

THIS book is an attempt to give a reasonably full and fair account of the Tripoli enterprise.

I have thought it unnecessary to burden the narrative of events with the details of my own experiences : the public must be weary of the stressed personal note. It seems enough to say that I arrived in Tripoli on November 19, 1911, and left on April 1, 1912 ; that during the nineteen weeks of my stay I was given all possible liberty of movement and investigation within the area occupied by the Italians, and that I availed myself fully of the freedom permitted. In describing those operations which took place outside the radius and period of my own experience I have relied, in the first place, upon the private official reports of the Italian military authorities, and, in the second place, upon the accounts of numerous eyewitnesses and participants, given to me in writing or in conversation. That all errors in detail have been avoided is unlikely ; but I believe that in every case the general picture is substantially correct.

The three large maps are reproduced from maps compiled by the military authorities in Tripolitania during the war, and my thanks are due to General Spingardi, the Italian Minister of War, and to General Caneva, late Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Tripolitania, for their kindness in supplying me with copies of these maps and allowing me to make use of them. The maps are sketch maps, and only approximately accurate : a new series,

recently compiled, corrects a number of minor errors. These errors, however, are not so important as to detract from the illustrative value of the maps. For the sketch maps of Benghazi and Derna, which face pp. 56 and 204 respectively, I am indebted to the courtesy of Signor Antonio Albertini, of the *Corriere della Sera*.

I am indebted also to the Marquis Imperiali, Italian Ambassador in London, and to Colonel Ugo Bagnani, Military Attaché, for permission to make use of the official reports supplied to the Embassy.

I have to thank the Editor of *The Times* for permission to republish matter contributed to *The Times* during the war.

To my friends, Captain Armando Mola, of the Italian General Staff, Count Giuseppe Della Gherardesca, Count Aldobrandino Malvezzi dei Medici, and Mr. W. F. Riley, I am much indebted for the photographs with which I have been able to supplement those taken by myself; and my acknowledgments are due to the firm of Comerio, Milan, for permission to publish photographs taken by them. I am specially indebted to Mr. Riley and Mr. G. Brown for the unique photograph which represents the first shell of the bombardment striking the Spanish Fort, and to Captain Scelsi, of the Italian Airship Battalion, for the photographs taken from airships.

In conclusion, I would express my thanks to those officers of the Italian Army, of all ranks, far too numerous to mention by name, of whose unfailing kindness and hospitality I have the warmest memory.

*May 1913.*

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# ITALY IN NORTH AFRICA

## CHAPTER I

### A RETROSPECT

IT was scarcely to be expected that the sudden accomplishment of Italy's long-threatened descent upon Tripolitania should meet with a warm welcome from the public opinion of Europe. To Italy, as far as can be ascertained, the moment of her action seemed specially opportune ; and in a sense it was so. For, if she had not seized the chance that seemed to present itself, there is more than a probability that it would never have recurred. On the other hand, the declaration of war came at a time when the nerves of Europe were still stretched and quivering with the tension of a crisis barely overpast ; and this fact rendered all but impossible a judicial estimate of the Italian move. A press and a public which for weeks had been rendered uneasy by the menace of a disastrous war were not likely to look with patience or coolness upon any breach of the world's peace, however justified. And the Tripoli enterprise threatened (as always when Turkey is concerned) to open up further complications, and to disturb the hardly preserved adjustment of various delicate questions.

In the circumstances, it is not a matter for surprise that the action of Italy was regarded with alarm, and criticised with obvious irritation by many of the organs which form, or at least guide, the public opinion of Europe. The

accusation of ‘brigandage,’ so widely levelled against Italy, is the patent offspring of ill-temper and anxiety. For it is not seriously to be supposed that the greater portion of the European Press was actually so ignorant of the Italo-Turkish situation as its accents would lead us to infer. The presumption is legitimate that the factors of the Tripolitan problem had passed temporarily out of mind under the stress of other and more clamorous interests. Otherwise it would be difficult to account satisfactorily for the lack of fairness displayed in the general tone of comment upon Italian action. The true explanation may be found in the fact that the public memory is short—and convenient. When Italy stretched out her hand to pluck an over ripe fruit, interest and circumstance urged Europe to an attitude at once forgetful and hypocritical.

Though hypocrisy and forgetfulness form a poor foundation for an impartial verdict upon any event, there are natural and compelling reasons why this basis of opinion was inevitable. To do more than indicate these reasons lies outside the scope of this chapter, or of this book ; but a rough indication seems essential to its purpose. One reason has already been outlined : the tense condition of European nerves, due to the long weeks of the Morocco crisis, was the first effective cause of European ill-humour. A second has been hinted at—the natural fear of Balkan complications ; and a third, not less powerful than the two first, reveals itself in the financial interests involved. The situation recalls a once famous sentence in the Report of the War Stores Commission. Behind the strutting, gesticulating stage-figures who mouthed reproaches and ranted accusations, there looms the gigantic shadow of the international financier, struck to the heart that he

wears in his pocket by the dangers which threatened to weaken Turkey. Attacking Turkey, Italy laid a desecrating hand upon the most sacred treasure-house of international finance. The nicely balanced complex of financial interests may remain stable under the threat, or even the shock, of a struggle between two great Powers. But Turkey has been the Ark of the Covenant, that might not be touched.

Perhaps Italy scarcely realised the magnitude of the interests she was assailing, or failed at least to understand that in face of these interests an ordinary, reasonable case could hardly expect to win general acceptance. It must be admitted that her case was further prejudiced, partly by unavoidable circumstance, partly by her own action. The Italian Government was at pains to justify the declaration of war by the publication of a brief which did not, and could not, set forth its whole case. It was rewarded by the assumption, on the part of a large section of public opinion, that no further justification was possible ; and, granting the assumption, there is excuse for an unsympathetic and critical attitude. While the list of grievances published in October 1911 was sufficient indication of an intolerable position, that list, taken by itself, scarcely answered the suggestion that the difficulties between Italy and Turkey might reasonably have been adjusted otherwise than by the occupation of Tripolitania. We have to look farther than to the bare enunciation of the incidents which constituted the *casus belli*—farther back and farther forward.

A remarkable feature of much foreign comment upon the situation is to be found in the suggestion that the Tripoli enterprise is the result of a sudden, unreasoning land-hunger—a greed for ‘colonies’ and ‘empire’—which has recently beset the Italian nation. Nothing could be wider

of the mark, and it is difficult to understand, or to regard with patience, the assumption that the question of Italy's demands in regard to Tripoli is a new question, suddenly sprung upon a startled and unsuspecting Europe. Such a contention rests upon a complete disregard of recent history. Nor is 'recent' a wholly suitable adjective, for Italian aspirations in North Africa date back three-quarters of a century.

It was in 1838 that Mazzini claimed North Africa for Italy—for the Italy that was not yet in being; and ever since the idea has lain at the back of every Italian statesman's mind. At first it was no more than an idea, a mighty dream of empire that looked forward to a day when the re-born Italy should resume the African provinces of Rome. Yet even in the early years Italian statesmen did not lack outside encouragement for their scarcely formulated aspirations. In 1866, when the dream had been already curtailed by the French occupation of Algeria, Bismarck wrote to Mazzini: 'The empire of the Mediterranean must be the constant thought of Italy, the objective of her ministers, the fundamental thought of the Cabinet at Florence.' While Bismarck's own objective, less obvious at the time, is clear as daylight now, with other examples to illuminate the truth, the correspondence shows at least, and the fact is important, that close upon fifty years ago Mazzini's early dream had crystallised into a definite, discussed, political aim. The aim persisted, though no Italian statesman was found able or willing to translate it into action, till the French descent upon Tunis, and the British occupation of Egypt, awoke Italy to the fact that the North African littoral was falling into readier hands. Egypt had scarcely formed the object of a practical ambition, though it had been embraced in the earlier dream,

but Tunis had been for years the definite centre of Italian hopes. The informed opinion of Italy, if not the Italian Government, had come to regard Tunis as a legitimate sphere of influence, and the lesson of French action in 1881 has never been forgotten. The dream was shattered, and the sentiment which had gone to its making concentrated slowly into a determination that the last remnant of Roman Africa open to Italian ambition (Morocco lay outside the radius of Italian aim) should be assured to Italy.

The strength of Italy's feeling in regard to the Mediterranean, and, specifically, in regard to the North African littoral, is sufficiently indicated by the fact that the French seizure of Tunis, and the prospect of further French activity, were the determining factors in the formation of the Triple Alliance. It has been argued often, and it is argued still, that the alliance of Italy with the Germanic Powers is altogether unnatural. But Italy saw clearly that the French occupation of Tunis, in her despite, arose directly from her weakness and isolation ; and she believed that if the interests which she considered vital were to receive consideration in the future, she was bound to assure herself of definite support from other Powers. Yet in all probability her ambitions in regard to Tripoli might have been realised more than thirty years ago, if at that time her attention had not been specially fixed upon Tunis. The publication of Crispi's Memoirs throws a clear light upon various points which have been the subject of debate, and though the pertinent passages have already been widely quoted, they cannot well be omitted in a review of the Tripoli question.

In the first place, it seems to be established beyond any doubt that Tripoli entered into the discussions which took place during the Congress of Berlin. An account of these

discussions was published in the *Standard* in May 1881, after the occupation of Tunis, but in an erroneous form, which drew a denial from Count Corti, the senior Italian representative at the Congress. Questions followed in Parliament, and Sir Charles Dilke, then Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, responded in the official manner which may sometimes be held to warrant an inference :—

‘All the information which Her Majesty’s Government is in a position to furnish is contained in the documents which have been placed on the table of the House, and I am unwilling to allow myself to be drawn into a discussion of this matter by answering my hon. friend’s question.’<sup>1</sup>

On the previous day Sir Charles Dilke had informed General Menabrea, the Italian Ambassador, that ‘he was greatly surprised by Count Corti’s denial, as proofs or documents of some kind really did exist at the Foreign Office in which the conversation in question was referred to.’<sup>2</sup>

General Menabrea relates that he ‘waited upon Lord Granville, with a request for a clear statement of the case in order that all doubt might be removed concerning a fact which had been publicly denied.’ Lord Granville was non-committal, and while he stated that ‘there had been no correspondence between the two Governments in regard to Tripoli, and that no official documents existed dealing with this subject,’ he would answer no further questions and give no further information.<sup>3</sup> The deduction was obvious, and General Menabrea reported to his Government that ‘these events have left me with the impression that at the Foreign Office they believe the question of the

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*, vol. ii. p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Id. ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id. ibid.*

cession of Tripoli to Italy as a compensation was ventilated in the course of conversation at the Berlin Congress.<sup>1</sup>

A further quotation from Crispi's Memoirs gives the exact truth of the matter :—

‘ General Menabrea’s impression was correct. The question of the cession of Tripoli was indeed ventilated at Berlin in the course of conversation which took place between Lord Salisbury and the second delegate to the Congress, Count de Launay, who had reported on this subject on August 11, 1878. Were they not in the habit of reading official communications at the *Consulta* ?

‘ De Launay had written :—

‘ “ . . . I have recently had a conference with my English colleague on this subject. I mentioned to him the conversations I had had with Lord Salisbury during the last days of the Congress, and said that I had expressed my regret to him that the English Government should not, at least, have spared us the surprise of learning through the newspapers of the convention regarding the Island of Cyprus. The head of the Foreign Office did his best to explain the circumstance, and allowed me to infer from his veiled utterances, *that Italy might dream of expansion in the direction of Tripoli or Tunis.* I was not authorised to enter upon a discussion on this point.”

‘ It is, therefore, an indisputable fact that Lord Salisbury felt that compensation was due to Italy, and if his opinion was expressed in such a manner as partially to hide his meaning from De Launay—naturally the English Minister could not reveal the understanding

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*, vol. ii. p. 117.

with France<sup>1</sup>—it should have become clear enough in 1881, when France had occupied Tunis.<sup>2</sup>

In point of fact, not only were Italian aspirations in regard to Tripoli acquiesced in by the other European Powers; Italy's attention was deliberately guided in that direction. Though the distrust of France which followed upon the occupation of Tunis drove Italy into Germany's arms, there is good reason to doubt whether her fears of further French expansion were justified in fact; if, at that time, she had been willing to undertake the responsibility of accepting the 'compensation' offered. It had been indicated by England that the acquisition of Tripoli would be favourably regarded, and it was obviously to France's interest that the friction inevitably consequent upon her actions in Tunis should be minimised by the offer of a *quid pro quo*. The suggestion made by Freycinet to the Italian Ambassador, in July 1880, must have been perfectly sincere.

'Why will you persist in thinking of Tunis, where your rivalry may one day cause a breach in our friendly relations? Why not turn your attention to Tripoli, where you would have neither ourselves nor any one else to contend with?' <sup>3</sup>

The Ambassador's comment is interesting: 'These words reminded me of a similar phrase which had once escaped the Duc Decazes, and the conviction was forced upon me that there really exists a permanent and traditional plan concerning the Mediterranean coast of Africa, a plan which all parties not only respect but do their best to safeguard and develop.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The understanding arrived at in Berlin, which assured British consent to the occupation of Tunis.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*, vol. ii. pp. 117, 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> *Id. ibid.*

Nor did Freycinet rest content with merely throwing out the suggestion. During this same interview he indicated with sufficient clearness that the French occupation of Tunis was a mere matter of time, and offered to support Italy in her natural desire for compensation.

'The future is in God's hands, and it is not impossible that one day, without doubt, still far off, France might be led, by the force of circumstances, to occupy and annex Tunis. . . . I can assure you that France has no intention whatsoever of occupying Tunis, but, as the future is in God's hands, and as it might possibly happen, sooner or later, that circumstances should force France into so doing, I wish to take this opportunity of assuring you that, in this event, *Italy would be informed as long beforehand as possible, and would receive our most cordial support in obtaining adequate and worthy compensation in the basin of the Mediterranean, in order that equilibrium of power be maintained between us.*'<sup>1</sup>

Here was a fair warning and a fair offer. Neither the one nor the other was adequately regarded by those who held the reins of power in Italy. They preferred to accept the letter of French assurances rather than the obvious hint underlying them and the evident trend of events. And, when the consummation they feared had actually come to pass, instead of accepting the proffered compensation, they turned too late to the alliance that might perhaps have preserved the *status quo* in Tunis. The lines of thought followed by the Cairoli Ministry and its two successors are difficult of comprehension, but two facts seem to reveal themselves: while Cairoli trusted France too much, Mancini trusted her too little.

The reaction was natural, but as a result Italy neglected

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*, vol. ii. p. 108.

two opportunities of strengthening her position in the Mediterranean : first, when she refused to avail herself of the compensation suggested by both France and England ; second, when she declined to co-operate with England in Egypt. The refusal to proceed to the acquisition of Tripoli was no doubt due, in part, to the inertia of the Cabinet, and to a reluctance to engage in commitments for which the country might not be ready, but another operative cause would seem to have lain in a deep distrust of France, in the feeling that as French declarations in regard to Tunis had proved worthless, so, too, French promises of support in Tripoli might be equally unworthy of credence. Perhaps the position was never stated so crudely ; in any event, the net result of French action in the Regency was that Italy felt herself impelled to consolidate her general position by the alliance with Germany and Austria. Other considerations were made subservient to the necessity of safeguarding herself against any further evidences of French hostility, and the practical certainty that France would have welcomed an Italian occupation of Tripoli was disregarded or disbelieved.

Little more than a year after the Treaty of Bardo the same distrust of France prevented Mancini from accepting England's invitation to joint action in Egypt. Lord Cromer sums up the situation as follows :—

‘ In view of the restless ambition displayed at times by the Italian Government, and their desire, which has frequently been manifested, to extend their influence in the Mediterranean, the refusal of Italy to co-operate with the British Government in Egypt appears at first sight strange. It is not probable that M. Mancini, who was then in power, could have

attached much importance to Turkish promises, or that he could have believed to any great extent in the efficacy of Turkish assistance. The real reasons for Italian inaction must be sought elsewhere than in a desire to spare the susceptibilities of the Porte.<sup>1</sup> Something may, without doubt, be attributed to a reluctance on the part of Italy to separate herself from the European concert. Something was also due to the fact that, from a naval and military point of view, the Italian Government was not ready to take prompt action. But the main reason was to be sought in the mistrust of France, which then existed in Italy, and in fear of ultimate collision with the French, which engendered a reluctance to co-operate with them.<sup>2</sup>

One glance at a map of the Mediterranean makes it evident why no Power looked with favour upon Italian aspirations in Tunis; why France felt it imperative to forestall Italian action, and why England lent support to a French occupation. The possession of Tunis and Sicily by the same Power would have severed too abruptly and completely the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean. A further look at the map shows as clearly why Italy could not resign herself to the possibility of Tripoli passing into other hands, more especially after the loss of Tunis. The occupation of Tripoli by another European Power would have hemmed her in fatally. The fact was well understood by France and England, and the inherent right of Italy to the reversion of Tripoli has long been recognised by both Powers.

<sup>1</sup> Italy's declared reason for declining to co-operate was the tardy and insincere acquiescence of the Porte in the European demand for Turkish intervention in Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. pp. 308-309.

From 1882 onwards the eventual occupation of Tripolitania by Italy was, practically speaking, an axiom of Mediterranean politics, and only the resolve of the leading men in Italy to devote the energies and resources of their country to internal development put off till yesterday an event which had been foreseen and reckoned with for more than a generation. Even before the events in Tunis and Egypt which narrowed the scope of Italian ambition, there had been a section of opinion which centred upon Tripolitania the hope of territorial acquisition which was stirring in Italy. The widely quoted letter of Rohlfs, the famous explorer, which was published in the journal *L'Esploratore* at the beginning of 1880, had a profound effect upon the comparatively few men who had begun to translate vague dreams into definite aims. Writing of his explorations in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Rohlfs says :—

‘ These results have a special importance for Italy, since I am persuaded that in the course of a few years Tripolitania will be “ once more ” Italian. The expression “ once more ” I consider to be perfectly accurate, since the present-day sons of the Apennine peninsula must be considered the successors of the Romans and of the Italic race.

‘ Northward of Tokra begins a landscape so green that it might be in Italy ; it is a territory which Italy must reconquer. It is incomprehensible to me that Italy has not set more value upon her rights over Tripoli. Later, I shall take it upon myself to prove that he who possesses that country will be the master of the Sudan. For me, the possession of Tunis has not a tenth part the value of Tripoli.’

The judgment of Rohlfs must always have been open to question, and it is clearly inapplicable to the altered circumstances of to-day. But its publication in *L'Esploratore*, the journal of the Milanese *Società d'Esplorazione Com-*

*merciale*, is a matter of historical interest. This Milanese Society made the first organised attempt to secure and collate reliable information regarding Tripolitania, and in 1881 two expeditions were sent to Cyrenaica, to explore and report. Interesting commercial reports were furnished by Signor Camperio, the leader of the main expedition, and Signor Pietro Mamoli, who devoted himself specially to agricultural possibilities. An extract from one of Mamoli's reports published in *L'Esploratore* (1883, No. iv.) may be taken as exemplifying the trend of Italian opinion :—

‘ Our departure for Cyrenaica, which drew the nation’s attention to that country, created desires and strong aspirations ; every one understood that in a future not distant that piece of coast would be our safety-valve.

‘ To put it shortly, everybody knows that, especially in Italy, the national aspirations mark out a way or constitute a law for the Government ; and the Government, however embarrassed by the requirements of diplomacy, cannot cease to fix its eye upon that idea which, like a shining star, moves always before it.

‘ When I left Italy it was still disputable whether or no it was opportune for us to adopt the so-called “ Colonial policy.”

‘ To-day, now that all the northern coast of Africa, with the exception of Tripolitania, has fallen into the hands of European Powers, justly or otherwise, can the matter be any longer in dispute ? ’

The question of the occupation of Tripoli was fully ventilated in the Italian press during the next few years, and in Tripolitania itself the arrival of an Italian expedition was expected. But no action was taken, and the colonial party, not yet strong or influential, reproached the Govern-

ment bitterly for its neglect. Brunialti, one of their spokesmen, writes with the utmost plainness :

‘ But the Italian Government let slip all opportunities, even those which seemed expressly designed to afford us a footing in the country.

‘ The possession of Tripoli, especially after the French occupation of Tunis, is not a question of greed for us, or of conquest in the true sense ; it is the means of providing for our safety and defence.

‘ In conclusion, we have never had the wit to acquire a dominating influence in Tripolitania ; we refused the offer of it when acceptance involved no danger ; we declined to take it when we had the strongest pretexts for doing so ; and we returned to Berlin in 1884-85, as we went in 1878, with clean hands.’<sup>1</sup>

The danger of being forestalled is accentuated, and a grave warning is addressed to those in power :

‘ Who will be responsible to the nation and to history for the dilemma in which Italy will find herself then, placed between an infinite risk and an infinite humiliation ? ’<sup>2</sup>

Distrust of France continued, and almost unbroken friction, while it was gradually borne in upon Italy that the Triple Alliance did not afford sufficient guarantee for her position in the Mediterranean. Though Austria had declared herself ready to accept any arrangement that would ‘ advance the interests of Italy in regard to the Tunisian Question, and further the possible acquisition of Tripoli ’ ; though Germany had seemed inevitably bound to support her ally against further French pretensions ; the position of Italy in the alliance was wholly unsatis-

<sup>1</sup> *L’Italia e la Questione Coloniale*, A. Brunialti, Deputato al Parlamento. Published in 1885.

<sup>2</sup> *Id. ibid.*

factory. While she had undertaken certain obligations, the object for which she had deliberately turned her back upon France was not yet assured to her. In Crispi's words, she 'still stood alone in the defence of her own interests.'

The natural result (a result, moreover, encouraged by Bismarck) was the attempt to establish an understanding with England, a comparatively simple matter in view of the traditional sympathy between the two countries, and the community of their interests in the Mediterranean. From 1887 onwards the British and Italian Governments acted in perfect accord over Mediterranean questions, until in 1902 the positions were still more clearly defined by the formal agreement which recognised the Tripolitan provinces as an Italian sphere of influence. Twelve years previously, in 1890, the rumour that France's grip upon Tunis was to be still further tightened by the conversion of the Protectorate into a complete sovereignty, caused an exchange of views between Crispi and Lord Salisbury. Crispi's claim to Tripoli was recognised fully by Lord Salisbury, who committed himself to the uncompromising opinion that 'on the day when the *status quo* in the Mediterranean shall suffer any alteration whatsoever, Italy's occupation of Tripoli will become an absolute necessity.'<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he advised Italy to wait. He pointed out that 'an attack on Tripoli by Italy would be the signal for the dismemberment of Turkey, a fate to which she will indeed be forced to submit in the end, but for which neither the Great Powers nor public opinion in England is at present prepared.'<sup>2</sup>

The recognition that the Germanic powers could not, or would not, give material support to their ally in Mediterranean questions, gave a new direction to Italian foreign

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*, vol. ii. p. 451.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 452.

policy. A cordial understanding existed with England, but it began to be realised that for this understanding to bear the desired fruit, an understanding with France was also necessary. While England could give a general support to Italian aims, the many points at which French and English interests touched made the determined hostility of France and Italy a handicap to the Anglo-Italian accord. In 1900 Visconti Venosta succeeded in establishing a *détente* with France, and two years later Prinetti negotiated the agreement which gave Italy a free hand in Tripolitania in return for a recognition of French predominance in Morocco. Shortly afterwards the understanding with England was cemented by an agreement which formally recognised Italy's lien upon Tripolitania. Upon this recognition by the two chief Mediterranean powers, an expedition to Tripoli was actually planned, but a strong difference of opinion in the Italian Cabinet put a stop to preparations which had already made some progress.

Not for the first or last time the Italian Government held back from the decisive step ; but the reluctance displayed did not arise from any failure to appreciate the importance of the Tripoli question. The value of Tripoli in Italian eyes is sufficiently indicated by the agreement with France and its results. For this agreement pledged Italy, morally at least, to support of France in Morocco, and at the Algeciras Conference it was seen that the Mediterranean agreements overbore the claims of the Triple Alliance.

Foiled in his desire to settle the Tripoli question once for all by a definite occupation, Prinetti, the Italian Foreign Minister in 1902, endeavoured to strengthen the Italian position by a policy of 'peaceful penetration.' Numerous difficulties were put in the way, as might have been expected, and during Signor Tittoni's tenure of office the Italian

Foreign Ministry vied with the Turkish authorities in discouraging the development of Italian enterprise in Tripoli ; but another opportunity for final action presented itself in 1908, when Austria definitely took possession of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in so doing tore up more than one treaty. As far as can be judged, this would have been the most favourable moment for Italy to proceed to the occupation of Tripolitania. The step was expected both in Italy and Tripoli, and report goes so far as to allege that the Italian Government was only restrained by the urgent protest of the third, and dominant, member of the Triple Alliance. Whatever the reasons were, the inaction of Italy at this juncture gave rise to a general supposition that the well-known and natural disinclination for political adventure, which had long characterised her leading politicians, had relegated the occupation of Tripolitania to the Greek Kalends, or, at the least, to that indeterminable date which should witness the final break-up of the Ottoman Empire.

That the supposition was falsified, and the date rudely anticipated, is a matter of history now ; and, in the circumstances, it is not altogether surprising that curiosity should have been rife regarding the reasons which at last induced Italy to go to Tripoli in an obvious hurry after holding back for so many years, and declining to take the decisive step at moments which appeared, on the surface, to be more suitable. Report has it that in the spring of 1911 she was unwilling to make the move, in spite of a hint that the Power which had said No three years before would be happy to support her. It is certain that half-way through the summer of the same year, though there was grave friction between the Italian and Turkish Governments, on account of the grievances alleged by the former, the Italian authorities were still reluctant to take the step so long fore-

shadowed. They wished to bide their time, to await the opportune moment, which they judged was not yet.

By the end of July the situation had been modified by the despatch of the *Panther* to Agadir. Germany's act ensured a revision of the map of Africa, and the support of England made it clear that the French position in Morocco would be finally regularised. It seemed that the hour for which Lord Salisbury had advised Crispi to wait was now at last about to strike. The *status quo* in the Mediterranean was quite clearly on the point of suffering an alteration. Moreover, the relations between Italy and Turkey had become severely strained, owing to the attitude of the latter; and the impossibility of obtaining any redress for a long series of grievances practically demanded the step which had been the subject of diplomatic discussion for more than thirty years. On July 29 the Italian Foreign Office instructed its representatives abroad that the situation, unless it bettered, would lead to decisive action on the part of Italy.



THE MARKET UNDER THE TOWN WALLS  
OLD TRIPOLI



PERFUME-SELLERS IN THE MARKET  
OLD TRIPOLI



## CHAPTER II

## THE DECLARATION OF WAR

THROUGHOUT the summer of 1911 the tide of feeling in Italy rose rapidly, and the patience of the Government slowly ebbed. The note of July 29 made it clear to official circles that Italy was prepared to assert her position in regard to Tripolitania, but at that date, there is reason to think, hopes were still entertained that the final issue might be deferred. Only the late conviction that the policy of peaceful penetration was inevitably doomed to failure could have won over Signor Giolitti to the move which he had consistently discouraged, and from which he had obstinately shrunk. The policy he had favoured was evidently to prove unsuccessful, and it became increasingly clear that the Italian people would not tolerate a failure to settle the Tripoli question satisfactorily for Italy. Informed public opinion had acquiesced in 'peaceful penetration' as a provisional policy, as a half-measure not unsuited, originally, to the circumstances of the case. But these circumstances had changed with the advent to power of the Young Turkish party, and with the developments which were now foreshadowed they threatened to alter still further to Italy's detriment.

By the end of the first week in September it became obvious to all who were watching the trend of events that the Italian Government was determined not to be balked of a satisfactory solution to the Tripoli question. Negotiations

were proceeding with Turkey for a settlement to which both Governments could agree, and a peaceful solution was obviously expected by Italy, for on September 3 the 1889 class of conscripts was dismissed, leaving only one class with the colours.<sup>1</sup> There was rumour that a protectorate might be arranged, but the standpoints were too wide apart. At the eleventh hour Turkey made the offer of important economic concessions, but this belated suggestion no longer seemed sufficient, in view of the changes, actual and potential, which threatened to prejudice Italy's position in the Mediterranean. If the moment passed, there seemed little probability that another would occur. The comity of nations entertains a natural dislike to a too frequent re-drawing of maps, and with the settlement of the Franco-German dispute it seemed certain that the Powers would deprecate the early raising of other vexed questions involving a change of flag. A probable interval of some years was indicated, if Italy let the present moment slip, and during that interval it was impossible to say what new claims might crop up to challenge her historic lien upon the Tripolitan provinces. The lesson of Tunis had been reinforced by the lesson of Morocco, and the bare offer of economic concessions was no satisfactory safeguard of the Italian position. From Italy's point of view her interests demanded the immediate recognition of her political predominance in the two provinces, and this recognition Turkey was naturally unwilling to accord. Nor could Turkey believe that the diplomatic and material support, which had so often propped her weakness, would be denied her in the present case.

<sup>1</sup> The 1889 class was recalled to the colours exactly two months later, on November 3, when the unexpected developments in Libya demanded the despatch of fresh units and considerable drafts.

About the middle of September it became clear that the sands were running out. Public opinion in both countries was in a state of tension, while the safety of the European inhabitants of Tripoli became a matter of some concern. On September 22 a demonstration took place in Constantinople, demanding the abolition of the Capitulations for Italian subjects, and calling for a boycott of Italian goods. On September 23 the Italian reservists of the 1888 class were recalled to the colours, and on the same day the news was made public that the Turkish steamer *Derna*, laden with arms and ammunition, was on its way to Tripoli. On September 25 the Italian *Chargé d'Affaires* at Constantinople delivered a note to the Porte, couched in the most emphatic terms, pointing out the danger run by Italian subjects in Tripoli, and warning Turkey that the despatch of transports or munitions of war to Tripoli at this juncture would be considered an unfriendly act. On September 27 the *Derna* arrived at Tripoli under the German flag, and on the same day the Italian Foreign Minister, Marchese Di San Giuliano, telegraphed Italy's ultimatum to Commendatore De Martino, Minister Plenipotentiary at Constantinople. The ultimatum was delivered to the Porte at 2.30 P.M. on September 28.

The ultimatum and Turkey's reply to it are characteristic documents of their kind. A stranger to the special circumstances of the case, and to the traditional qualities of Turkish diplomacy, would be puzzled, perhaps indignant, at Italy's uncompromising attitude in face of the sweet reasonableness displayed by Turkey. But the documents may best speak for themselves, the ultimatum first :—

'Throughout a long series of years the Royal Government has not ceased to impress upon the Sublime Porte

the absolute necessity for putting an end to the condition of disorder and neglect in which Tripolitania and Cyrenaica have been left by Turkey, and for admitting these regions to the enjoyment of a progress similar to that effected in other parts of Northern Africa. Such a transformation, which is demanded by the ordinary exigencies of civilisation, is a question of vital interest for Italy, on account of the nearness of these regions to Italian shores.

' In spite of the line of conduct adopted by the Royal Government, which has accorded its loyal support to the Imperial Ottoman Government in various political questions, some of recent date, in spite of the moderation and patience of which the Royal Government has hitherto given ample proof, not only have its intentions in regard to Tripolitania been misunderstood by the Imperial Government but, what is more serious, every Italian initiative in those regions has always met with a systematic opposition, obstinate and unjustified.

' The Imperial Government which had hitherto, in this way, displayed its constant hostility against every legitimate Italian activity in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, has recently, at the eleventh hour, proposed terms of agreement, declaring itself disposed to accord any economic concessions that are compatible with existing treaties and with the dignity and sovereign interests of Turkey. But the Royal Government does not now feel itself able to enter into any negotiations of the kind. Past experience has shown that such negotiations are futile, and that instead of constituting a guarantee for the future they could only give cause for permanent friction and conflict.

' On the other hand, the information which the Royal Government receives from its consular agents in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica describes the situation there as ex-

tremely dangerous, on account of the anti-Italian agitation, an agitation which has been provoked, in the clearest manner, by officers and other mouthpieces of Turkish authority. This agitation constitutes an imminent danger, not only to Italians but to foreigners of every nationality, and these, justly perturbed and preoccupied for their safety, have begun to take ship and leave Tripoli without delay.

'The arrival at Tripoli of Ottoman military transports, whose despatch the Italian Government pointed out would be attended by serious consequences, is bound to aggravate the situation, and to impose upon the Italian Government the duty and obligation of taking measures against the resultant dangers.

'The Italian Government, seeing itself forced in this way to consider how to safeguard its dignity and its interests, has decided to proceed to a military occupation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

'This solution is the only one which Italy can accept; and the Italian Government depends upon the Imperial Government to give such orders as may prevent any opposition on the part of the Ottoman representatives, in order that all necessary measures may be effected without difficulty.

'Further arrangements will be entered into by the two Governments to regulate the situation which will arise from the occupation.

'The Embassy at Constantinople has orders to request a definite and final answer from the Ottoman Government within the space of twenty-four hours from the presentation of this document to the Sublime Porte. Failing which, the Italian Government will be under the necessity of proceeding at once to such measures as may be required to carry out the occupation.'

It is scarcely likely that the Italian Government expected a satisfactory reply to its demand. Turkey was bound to temporise, for till the last moment she believed that Italy was bluffing, and that if the bluff were 'seen,' the support of the other European Powers furnished her with a hand strong enough to win the stakes. The answer of the Porte is a model of what such an answer should be. Its tone of pained surprise, of dignified remonstrance, of frank willingness to consider all demands that could honourably be granted, reflects the highest credit upon the official responsible for the document :—

'The Royal Embassy is aware of the manifold difficulties which have prevented Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from participating to the extent desired in the blessings of progress. An exposition of the facts is indeed sufficient to demonstrate that the constitutional Ottoman Government cannot be charged with the responsibility for a situation which is the work of the old régime.

'This granted, the Sublime Porte, recapitulating the events of the past three years, has searched in vain for the occasions on which it is supposed to have shown itself hostile to Italian enterprise in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. On the contrary, the Porte has always thought it understandable and rational that Italy should co-operate with her capital and her industrial activity in the economic revival of this part of the Empire.

'The Imperial Government is conscious of having shown itself well disposed on every occasion that it has found itself faced by proposals conceived on those lines. It has likewise examined, and, generally speaking, has resolved in the most amicable spirit all complaints presented by the Royal Embassy.

‘ Is it necessary to add that in so doing it obeyed its wish, so frequently manifested, to cultivate and maintain relations of trust and friendship with the Italian Government ?

‘ Moreover, it was inspired solely by this sentiment when it lately proposed to the Royal Embassy an arrangement based upon economic concessions with the view of furnishing a vast field for Italian activity in the Provinces mentioned. In assigning as the sole limit to its concessions the dignity and sovereign interests of the Empire and any treaties already existing, the Ottoman Government gave the measure of its conciliatory sentiments, without, however, losing sight of those treaties and conventions which hold it pledged in regard to other Powers, arrangements whose international validity cannot lose force by the will of one party only.

‘ As far as the order and security of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica are concerned, the Ottoman Government, being in a position to judge the situation, can only emphasise what it has already had the honour to point out, regarding the total lack of any reason which can justify apprehensions as to the fate of Italian subjects and other foreigners settled in those regions. Not only is there at this moment no sort of agitation observable and still less any propaganda of incitement, but the officers and other instruments of Ottoman authority are instructed to ensure the preservation of order, and are conscientiously carrying out their instructions.

‘ As for the arrival at Tripoli of Ottoman military transports, to which the Royal Embassy is induced to attribute grave consequences, the Sublime Porte thinks it necessary to point out that, actually, only one small transport is in question, which was despatched previous to the Italian

Note of September 27. Moreover, the despatch of this vessel, which does not contain troops, can only have had a reassuring influence upon all minds.<sup>1</sup>

' Reduced to its essential terms, the actual difficulty lies in the lack of guarantees sufficient to reassure the Italian Government regarding the expansion of its economic interests in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

' The Royal Government, if it will refrain from so serious an act as a military occupation, will find the Sublime Porte firmly resolved to smooth out this difficulty.

' The Imperial Government, therefore, requests the Royal Government to be so good as to indicate the nature of such guarantees, to which it will willingly subscribe, so long as they do not touch its territorial integrity. With this end in view, it pledges itself not to modify in any way whatsoever, during the negotiations, the existing situation in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, particularly from the military standpoint, and it expresses the hope that the Royal Government will yield to the sincere dispositions of the Sublime Porte, and adhere to the present proposal.'

The Italian response as published in the press, the formal declaration of war, is short and to the point :—

' As the Ottoman Government has not accepted the demands contained in the Italian Ultimatum, Italy and Turkey are from this date, September 29, 2.30 P.M., in a state of war.

' The Royal Government will provide, with all the means at its disposal, for the safety of Italians and all other foreigners of whatever nationality in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

<sup>1</sup> The vessel in question was the *Derna*. It is not clear why her cargo of arms and ammunition, destined for distribution among the Arabs, should have had the 'reassuring influence' claimed by the Porte.

‘The blockade of the whole coast of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica will be notified immediately to the neutral Powers.’

The following note was added in the newspapers:—

‘At 5.40 P.M. to-day the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the following declaration to the representatives of the press:

‘The Turkish Note in response to the Italian Ultimatum did not give the definite and final answer requested, but was evasive and procrastinating.

‘For this reason the Government of the King of Italy has declared war upon Turkey.’

On the surface the reason would scarcely appear sufficient, and a mere perusal of Italy’s demand and Turkey’s answer is almost bound to incline the reader to a judgment in favour of Turkey’s case. But it is hardly possible, nor would it be desirable, for a Government to plead its cause fully by means of published statements in the press. Italy’s case cannot be summed up within the limits of a bare official communication, nor on the other hand can Turkey’s defence be rightly appreciated without some knowledge of the diplomatic habits of the Porte. If Italy’s ultimatum has the appearance of a high-handed determination to override the eminently reasonable claims of Turkey, it should be remembered that the ultimatum was the result of a long experience which had shown conclusively that Turkish statements and Turkish promises are worth much less than the paper on which they are written.

In point of fact, Italy had been very long-suffering in face of a series of actions detrimental alike to her material interests and to her prestige. Her shipping was interfered with in the Red Sea, her nationals were ill-treated and denied ordinary justice in various parts of the Ottoman

Empire, and where the Italian Government demanded redress, the Ottoman Government opposed an actual, if not a formal, *non possumus*. It is safe to say that no other European Power would have tolerated for so long the attitude adopted by Turkey towards Italy. In Tripolitania, especially, Italian enterprise was thwarted, and Italian subjects ill-treated, even murdered ; and formal protests obtained no satisfaction.

Some critics of Italy's action have displayed their ill-humour by blaming the Italian Government for the causes which led to the war as well as for the war itself. Beginning with a condemnation of the war as being without excuse, they shift their ground when faced with a list of Italy's grievances, and declare that Italy was clearly at fault in allowing such a condition of things to arise, that it is the duty of a Government to safeguard its prestige without proceeding to extremities. The argument is surely faulty. Italians may say with some justice that successive Governments had failed to assert Italy's position to the extent that her interests demanded, and this line of reasoning may be pursued by all who favour the Italian occupation of Tripolitania. But the critics of Italy's action in declaring war may not criticise the earlier policy that some Italians have characterised as *viltà*. It is all very well to allege that a Power should be able to conserve its interests and dignity without the use of force. Such an argument is at best only valid in the case of those Powers whose history has proved that they are able and ready to back words by deeds, to exact a stern penalty for neglect of their just demands. Great Britain, France and Germany have all at different times made it clear that if they are refused the less they will proceed to take the greater ; Italy had yet to show that she was prepared to follow the same path.

Moreover, it must be remembered that in the case of Turkey the ordinary rules scarcely apply. International jealousy has more than once made it difficult for a European Power to bring the Porte to book for its methods.

It may be argued that Turkey had every right to oppose Italian enterprise in the Tripolitan provinces ; that Italian aims were well known, and that in course of time the policy of peaceful penetration would have furnished a pretext for the political intervention so long foreshadowed. To deny the truth of this forecast would be absurd ; Tripolitania was inevitably destined, sooner or later, to be detached from Turkish rule.

In all probability an assent to the more modest claims first made by Italy would have put off the date until the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, until the uncertain but inevitable day when Europe should finally reckon with the Turk. Still, without doubt, Turkey was placed upon the horns of a serious dilemma, and deserves every sympathy that is compatible with the facts of the case. On the other hand, those who would argue that Turkey has full right to control as she pleases the provinces of her empire, forget under what conditions that empire has existed. For long Turkey has not been, in the real sense of the word, an independent sovereign power. The Ottoman Empire has survived so long only through the jealousies of Europe, and Turkish rulers knew how to take full advantage of the fact. They played upon these jealousies often enough, that the anachronism of their rule might survive. With the advent to power of the Young Turkish party, all Europe stood aside in an honest effort to allow Turkey to regenerate herself, to build up a reasonably modern system of government out of the doubtful materials that lay to hand. Young Turkey was given every chance. Excesses

of all kinds, massacres no less horrible than the very worst under the old régime, were by a tacit conspiracy ignored or pardoned. In the circumstances, it was not too much to ask that the Young Turkish party should attempt to deal fairly and squarely with the civilised Powers of Europe. But Young Turkey, so far, has been simply Old Turkey writ large. To the bluffing and temporising which had its origin in a realisation of European jealousy the new government added an arrogance born of the knowledge that Europe welcomed a new parliament. Believing itself secure of support from the strongest Powers, Young Turkey made the mistake of thinking that Italy could be defied with impunity.

The suggestion has already been made that if we are to understand the position of Italy at the declaration of war, it is necessary to look both backward and forward. The short *résumé* given in the previous chapter will have shown how for more than a generation Italy had watched Tripolitania, patiently, jealously, waiting for the day when it should fall naturally into her possession, and, latterly, trying to strengthen her position there, to make good her title to the reversion of the desired territory. Honesty should compel the admission, that the annexation of the country by some European Power had become a crying necessity. The blessings of civilisation may frequently develop into curses, but at the worst they constitute a lesser evil than the oppressions and corruptions which attend the government of a subject people by an alien power which can lay no claim to civilisation. After eighty years of direct Turkish rule the territories which have now been annexed by Italy were sunk in helpless misery and decay. Explorers in Tripolitania from Richardson to Vischer have recorded the same story—how Turkish



A MOSQUE IN THE OASIS

OLD TRIPOLI



A SAINT'S TOMB, ON THE GARGARESH ROAD



extortion and misgovernment have crushed the subject peoples and let in the relentless desert upon the fields and gardens which their owners were constrained in despair to abandon.

Modern political opinion is sharply divided as to the proper function of Governments, as to the assignation of their rights and duties. The problem is not one which has troubled the Turkish mind ; in the Ottoman Empire the ruling principle of administration would seem to be that a Government is not greatly concerned with duties, that its function is to exact, not to perform. This principle, moreover, when pushed to its furthest conclusion in the way of exactions, carries with it the negation of all performance, private as well as public ; and the fruits of its application are manifest throughout the countries which have lain under the unchecked sway of the Turk. No one, surely, will be found to deny that the Tripolitan provinces were suffering the approaches of actual death. There was no sign or hope of any betterment under Turkish rule.

To judge Young Turkey by the fact that no improvements had been effected in Tripolitania since the downfall of the Hamidian régime would clearly be unjust. The party or parties of reform had their hands full with other more pressing problems. The Tripolitan provinces appeared, no doubt, to lie outside the searchlight cast upon the Ottoman Empire by the Powers ; and first efforts would naturally be directed to those problems which had long attracted unwelcome notice and threatened European intervention. Albania, Macedonia, and Armenia furnish the test by which the Committee of Union and Progress must accept judgment. So judged, can Young Turkey escape the verdict of civilisation upon Old Turkey : that the Turk, with all his magnificent qualities, is incapable of government and

administration, in the Western sense of the words ? Lord Cromer described the late Sultan, in a diplomatic crisis, as ' a bewildered ruler, who was, perforce, obliged to speak the language of civilisation, but whose principles of civil government were very similar to those of his warlike ancestors, when they planted their horse-tails on the banks of the Bosphorus.'<sup>1</sup> The Young Turks have acquired a greater fluency in 'the language of civilisation,' but it remains a foreign tongue.

The condition of affairs in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica clearly demanded, and as clearly foreshadowed, an early European intervention. The continuance of the slave-trade in Cyrenaica, the general insecurity of the two provinces, the prevailing maladministration and neglect—these evils could not be indefinitely tolerated in a land so near to Europe, lying moreover between two countries to which European interference had already brought order and prosperity. Italy had to face the fact that if she could not consolidate her claim to have a decisive say in the destinies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, other voices would make themselves heard, perhaps even shout her down. The slow accumulation of grievances against Turkey, and the alteration of North African equilibrium, rendered inevitable by the settlement of the Morocco problem, might in themselves be considered to give sufficient grounds for action. But a general apprehension of forestalment<sup>2</sup> supplied an added reason ; and rumour has obstinately suggested a particular danger which has the advantage of

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> This 'general apprehension' is evidenced by frequent references in the Italian press to possible frontier encroachments by the French and British authorities in Tunis and Egypt. France was supposed to be casting a longing eye upon Ghadames, while England was sometimes credited with designs upon Tobruk.

explaining more satisfactorily the obvious haste with which military action was finally taken.

It has been widely maintained, and in spite of denial the rumour persists, that if Italy had not gone to Tripoli yesterday Germany would have gone there to-morrow.

Two stories are current. The first seems hardly credible, and it has been officially denied; though in given circumstances the significance of a diplomatic denial is frequently negligible. The story is repeated here because it is widely believed in Italy and has undoubtedly influenced Italian public opinion. It was stated, and the statement originally came from what is known as 'a good source,' that Germany brought forward the Tripoli question during the Moroccan negotiations, and made the suggestion that in return for her acquiescence in a French Protectorate in Morocco she should be allowed a free hand in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The story goes that in view of her engagements with Italy regarding the territory in question, and in view also of the alteration of the balance of power in the Mediterranean which would follow such an arrangement, France declined to consider the suggestion put forward, and allowed Italy to get wind of the matter.

The contradictions of German diplomacy are well known and understood, and a quite feasible explanation is offered for the different attitudes supposed to have been adopted by Germany in the spring and in the late summer of 1911. While it is not possible to explore the minds of those responsible for German policy, the known facts and the circumstances of the time, taken together, are held to justify a reasonable deduction. If it is the case that Germany encouraged Italy to go to Tripoli in the spring, it was obviously because she thought that her encourage-

ment might make out a case for 'compensation,' or, to put it more bluntly, payment for services rendered. Perhaps it was expected that Italy would be willing to surrender Tobruk to her ally, or even a larger slice of territory, in return for support in her occupation of the Turkish provinces. By the middle of the summer the situation had changed, and a more favourable opportunity was offered to German aspirations. Italy had declined the friendly hints of the spring, and it was possible to break fresh ground altogether by coming to an arrangement with France.

Although the story is circumstantial, and fits very well into the gaps which have been found in Italy's case, it can hardly be accepted without first-hand proof of the items alleged. When the weather is misty, and panthers are on the prowl, people may be pardoned for wishing to take no risks. But at present the details of the story are not susceptible of proof ; there are many circumstances which render them improbable ; and the suggestion that Germany meditated a descent upon the Tripolitan coast must be rejected. On the other hand, there is good reason to believe that the Italian Government did fear that Italy's position might be prejudiced by German action, though in a less direct and violent manner. The second story is not only reasonable ; it may almost be said to bear the stamp of truth.

For some years the Italians in Tripoli had been rendered uneasy by some very small beginnings of commercial activity by Germany, in a sphere which Italy had looked upon as mainly reserved for herself, so far as fresh enterprise went. Her uneasiness was increased by the appointment of a regular German Consul in Tripoli, by the establishment of a steamer service by the *Deutsche Levant Linie*, and by the fact that German interests were being allowed to

develop at a time when every possible obstacle was put in the way of Italian commercial effort. Late in the summer of 1911 news came that Germany was conducting negotiations in Constantinople with a view to securing important economic privileges in Tripolitania. Italy was face to face with a very difficult situation. She learned that the Turkish authorities, who had consistently thwarted her efforts to develop her commercial interests, were prepared to grant the desired facilities to the enterprise of another nation, a nation with vast political ambitions and immense political energy. The example of Morocco had shown how the acquisition of commercial interests led to political claims, and she perceived that in the present case a special danger lurked. It might have been well worth while for Turkey to cede a part or even the whole of her African provinces to Germany, in exchange for support and assistance elsewhere. Italy saw, in fact, that her long-standing lien upon Tripolitania was in danger of being disregarded and nullified.

The policy of pin-pricks which had irritated her pride and irked her patience at once assumed different proportions. It was all very well to be long-suffering with Turkey when there was no one to deal with but Turkey, when Turkey merely declared herself opposed to Italian enterprise in Tripoli. There is little doubt that Italy would have preferred, for some time at least, to continue the policy of pacific penetration, to wait for the ripe fruit to drop instead of daring to pluck it from the tree. But when Turkey appeared ready to grant to another Power the privileges she had refused to Italy, the question of national prestige at once arose. It was a deliberate and obvious slight upon Italy's position as a nation that Turkey should persist in a policy which barely stopped short of open insult,

and at the same time should be ready to accord the desired concessions to a third party.

Turkey could not with plausibility maintain that in the case of Germany she had no need to fear ulterior political aims. Germany's methods are too well known to admit of such a contention. She is legitimately ambitious of making her flag follow her trade, wherever possible. Commercial concessions to Germany in Tripolitania were inevitably bound to result in subsequent political claims. For this reason, in view of the reported negotiations in Constantinople, it was clearly impossible for Italy to accept Turkey's belated offer of economic concessions which were to be limited by 'those treaties and conventions which hold it (the Turkish Government) pledged in regard to other Powers.' Italy was bound to act, and to act at once, to preserve her national dignity and to secure herself against the possibility of forestalment.

It is frankly admitted in Italy, and the fact should be readily appreciated by the rest of Europe, that the Italian case does not rest upon any flagrant *casus belli*, but upon broader grounds, upon a general attitude on the part of Turkey, and upon the necessity of ensuring that the political equilibrium in the Mediterranean should not be altered to Italy's disadvantage. The question was practically reduced to one of national status. For Italy the occupation of Tripolitania was an historical necessity.

After all, few wars have been fought on stronger grounds. The excuses for wars have often been more carefully compiled ; the preliminaries have sometimes been more formally adjusted ; but the dominant motive of modern war is always the same. Italy declared war, and fought throughout a year, not for the mere possession of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, but for the maintenance of her national posi-

tion, for the development of her national spirit. She had no alternative but to send her ultimatum if she was to maintain her national prestige and assure her position in the Mediterranean. She could not afford to be flouted by Turkey, and she could not afford to risk a possible repetition of her experience in regard to Tunis.

## CHAPTER III

THE FIRST PHASE OF THE WAR : THE OCCUPATION  
OF THE COAST TOWNS

ACTION followed slowly upon the formal declaration of war, so slowly as to give additional warrant for the conclusion that the ultimatum had been prematurely launched in order to forestall the intervention of some third party in the game. It was well known in Italy that the expeditionary corps would not be ready to start until the end of the first week in October, and the belief had been general that the critical point of the negotiations would be delayed until that date. A party of Italian journalists arrived in Tripoli on September 28, to witness the passing of Turkish rule and record the picture of its last days. Most of them were at least half convinced that the Porte would yield to Italy's declared intentions, and that they would be present at an unopposed occupation by Italian troops. Events fell out differently, and the unexpected ultimatum resulted in their departure from Tripoli, along with all other Italian subjects, forty-eight hours after their arrival.

On the afternoon of September 28 an Italian squadron appeared off Tripoli in line of battle, and steamed slowly past the town. The squadron consisted of two battleships (*Napoli* and *Roma*), four armoured cruisers (*Amalfi*, *Varese*, *Francesco Ferruccio* and *Giuseppe Garibaldi*), and six destroyers. The procession of ships made a brave spec-

tacle, their decks cleared for action, their Italian flags blown out square by the wind and showing very clear in the strong light. A profound impression was created in Tripoli. At last, it seemed, the Italians meant business. Mixed feelings prevailed in the town, but conviction at least had dawned : even the German Consul ceased to calm anxious inquirers by the assurance that his Government would never permit an Italian occupation of Tripoli. A night of suspense followed, and next morning the destroyer *Garibaldino* entered the port under a white flag. An officer landed, and was conducted to the *Konak*, where he announced to the acting *Vali* that the period of grace announced in the Italian ultimatum would expire at 2 P.M., and that at this hour, failing a satisfactory reply from the Porte, a state of war would begin.

People in Tripoli seem to have expected immediate action on the part of the Italian fleet, and at 2 o'clock the flag on the Italian Consulate was lowered, and replaced by the German flag. The hours dragged on without any sign from the fleet. Lamenting fugitives, or rather would-be fugitives, besieged all the Consulates, clamouring for protection or for means of escape. A British tramp, the *Castlegarth*, was filled with Maltese and Jews, flying terror-stricken from under the impending shadow of war, but many others remained in Tripoli, unable to escape or unwilling to abandon their property and interests. In the small hours of the morning the Italian Consul received a telegram from his Government, informing him of Turkey's refusal to accede to the demands of the ultimatum, and notifying the consequent declaration of war.

Most of the Italian subjects resident in Tripoli had already left the town, a week, a fortnight, three weeks before.

About one hundred and fifty remained, including the newly-arrived journalists, and many of these had collected in the Consulate for protection. On the morning of September 30, Dr. Tilger, the German Consul, arranged with the acting Governor for a safe conduct from the Consulate to the port. The Consulate and the inn which sheltered the correspondents had been closely guarded for two days, for the Turkish authorities had feared that the strained situation might result in violence, and troops were now ordered to line the narrow streets that led from the Consulate to the port. Thanks to these precautions there was no hint of violence, and the only insult came, very unfortunately, from an ex-officer of the German army named von Lochow, who had bought a property on the outskirts of Tripoli, and had more than once hinted mysteriously that his Government was behind him. As the correspondents passed, he allowed himself to fling an unworthy jeer : 'Here come the heroes who are running away. I'll telegraph the news for you.'

The overcrowded *Castlegarth* took the party on board and left the harbour ; but within two hours they were transferred to Italian warships. The Consul, the personnel of the Consulate, the correspondents and a few of the leading residents in Tripoli were accommodated on board the three cruisers *Varese*, *Francesco Ferruccio* and *Giuseppe Garibaldi*. The rest were shipped off to Syracuse in the torpedo cruiser *Coatit*.

In the meantime the Turkish authorities had been notified that the port of Tripoli was blockaded, and that at the end of three days, failing surrender, the blockade would be followed by a bombardment. The main Italian fleet cruised up and down the narrow seas between Sicily and the Tripolitan coast, while the *Pisa* and *Amalfi*, sister ships,

fast modern armoured cruisers of an unusual type,<sup>1</sup> proceeded eastward to Derna, where on October 3 they knocked the wireless telegraph station to pieces. On the morning of October 1 the torpedo boat *Albatros* had cut the cable from Tripoli to Malta; so that direct communication between Europe and the two provinces was now interrupted. On October 1 and the following day the bombarding squadron, under Admiral Faravelli, rendezvous'd off Tripoli. The constitution of the squadron is particularly interesting, for the ships could lay no claim to modernity. Admiral Faravelli's flagship, the *Benedetto Brin*, launched in 1901, may be classed with our *Duncans*, though she is slightly faster, and has a heavier armament. Of the four remaining battleships belonging to the squadron, the *Re Umberto*, *Sardegna*, and *Sicilia* were launched in 1888, 1890 and 1891 respectively. They carry four 67-ton Armstrong guns (calibre 13.5), but their armour is negligible and they no longer figure in tables of comparative naval strength. The fifth battleship was the *Emanuele Filiberto*, a small battleship of 9600 tons, launched in 1897, while the bombarding fleet was completed by the *Carlo Alberto*, an old-fashioned, slab-sided armoured cruiser launched in 1896, and the homogeneous cruiser squadron consisting of the *Varese*, *Ferruccio* and *Garibaldi*, twenty-knot armoured cruisers of 7000 tons. Only the *Brin* and the cruiser squadron belong to Italy's active fleet; her newer ships and guns were not to be wasted on the bombardment of an all but defenceless town.

<sup>1</sup> The *Pisa* and *Amalfi* are 23-knot cruisers of 9832 tons. They carry four 10-inch, eight 7.5-inch, and sixteen 3-inch guns, and are well armoured, with an 8-inch belt of Krupp steel tapering to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches, while their heavy guns are protected by 7-inch armour.

Naval activity had already begun off Prevesa, where, on September 29 and 30, Italian destroyers sank two Turkish torpedo-boats. A veto was put upon further action in these waters by the desire to avoid trenching upon Austrian susceptibilities, and this self-denying ordinance remained in force till the end of the war. Eyes began to turn further east. On October 1 Admiral Aubry left Augusta with the two battleships *Roma* and *Vittorio Emanuele*, and the torpedo-cruiser *Agordat*, to pick up the *Napoli*, *Pisa* and *Amalfi*, and go in search of the Turkish fleet, which was uncomfortably placed at Beyrouth.

In Tripoli a natural confusion prevailed, but every credit must be given to the Turkish authorities for the control which they exercised over the population, and for the fact that during those critical days the European residents were faithfully guarded from the hazards of the situation. There appears to have been a difference of opinion between the military commandant and some of his officers as to the proper course to pursue. Munir Pasha seems to have considered the advisability of formally surrendering the town, while Neshat Bey, with the natural inclination of a soldier, was keen to offer every possible resistance. The German Consul entered an urgent protest against the policy of defending the town. He pointed out that it could not succeed, that it would involve enormous damage, and the probable extinction of the European colony.

On the evening of October 2 Admiral Thaon De Revel, commanding the cruiser squadron, landed in Tripoli under a white flag and renewed the demand for the surrender of the town. At the interview which took place the German Consul was present, but no satisfactory issue was reached. The Turkish authorities were anxious to await orders from Constantinople, but it was finally intimated that failing a

formal surrender of the town, the bombardment would begin at noon on the following day. The Italians offered to embark the Consuls, and all Europeans remaining in the town, before proceeding to action.

Till the last moment the belief seems to have been prevalent that no bombardment would actually take place, that the Turks would surrender or retire before the firing began. But late on the evening of October 2 it was finally decided that some show of resistance must be made. It appears that a message had been received from the Government at Constantinople, directing the Turkish garrison to retire towards the interior and await further orders. Surrender, therefore, was out of the question, and military honour demanded that the troops should only retire in face of an actual display of force, not at a mere threat of action. The acting Governor informed Dr. Tilger of the decision taken, and it was left to the Consular Corps to choose whether they would risk remaining in the town or take advantage of the chance to place themselves in safety.

A midnight meeting was convened in the British Consulate, and lasted a great part of the night. Unfortunately, no official reporter was present to record the proceedings, which seem to have been marked by various entertaining incidents. Perhaps they were only entertaining after the event. At the time they were probably wholly exasperating. Nerves were suffering from strain ; the representatives of the more loquacious nationalities with whom *Zungefertigkeit* is a natural gift, talked round the subject at enormous length ; and the meeting seemed far from coming to any conclusion, though a certain tendency to self-preservation was observable. At length the patience of the more silent members was exhausted. One of them broke in upon a masterly exposition of the diffi-

culties inherent in the situation by the downright assertion : ' You talk too much,' and another took advantage of the dramatic pause which followed to state his position clearly, and try to force a decision. ' I stay for one. What do you say, Mr. — ? '

' I stay also.'

' And you ? '

' I stay.'

' And you ? '

The example had been set, and in less than a minute the majority of the consular representatives had avowed the intention of sticking to their posts. The others agreed to support the decision, though with obvious misgiving, and the conference dissolved. Apparent agreement had been reached, and the decision was communicated to the Governor; but a few hours later one of the minority felt impelled to revert to his original intention. He embarked in a small boat, determined to make a push for safety, but the Turkish authorities refused to allow him to leave the harbour. He was intercepted and escorted back to his house.

During the hours which preceded the bombardment, many Arabs and Jews fled blindly from Tripoli. The rumour spread that the Italians were going to destroy the town, and a wild terror resulted. The streets were deserted, and people huddled in cellars to escape the destruction that threatened. Though the flags flying from the Consulates seemed to indicate safety zones at various points, in point of fact bad marksmanship would have rendered some of them actual danger-points, for the British and French Consulates, and the office of the Eastern Telegraph Company, where the American Consul was living at the time, are in near proximity to the harbour fortifications,

## THE OCCUPATION OF THE COAST TOWNS 45

especially the two first, and the Italian fire was naturally confined to this point. Any other part of the town was perfectly safe.

The bombardment was generally expected at noon, but the hour actually fixed was three o'clock, and the first shot was not fired until half an hour later. The Italian fleet was ranged in three divisions. The *Re Umberto*, *Sardegna* and *Sicilia* cruised slowly backwards and forwards to the west of the town, and directed their fire upon the three forts, Sultanieh, B. and C., which lie between Tripoli and Gargaresh. The *Benedetto Brin*, *Emanuele Filiberto*, and *Carlo Alberto* lay off the town, at a distance of nearly six miles, their target being the harbour fortifications ; while Fort Hamidieh, to the east of the town, was taken charge of by the *Giuseppe Garibaldi* and the *Francesco Ferruccio*. The *Varese* cruised ten miles out to sea, and took no part in the silencing of the forts.

The first shot was fired by the *Benedetto Brin*, at 3.30, and it struck the old Spanish Fort fair and square.<sup>1</sup> A broadside followed, and another, before the forts replied, and their answer was useless. The *Emanuele Filiberto* and the *Carlo Alberto* had been ordered to keep farther out to sea than the flagship, so as to be out of range of the Turkish guns, but no Turkish shell came within hailing distance of an Italian ship, and after half an hour the squadron closed in upon the town. Meanwhile the forts on the outskirts of Tripoli were being methodically knocked to pieces. Fort Sultanieh responded, slowly and stubbornly, for nearly an hour, but the odds were too heavy. A little after half-past four the last Turkish shell plunged into the sea, pathetically ineffective like those which had preceded it. The other forts were silenced even sooner, and the bombard-

<sup>1</sup> See illustration on opposite page.

ment slackened about five o'clock. The last shot was fired at Sultanieh by the *Re Umberto*, less than two miles from the shore, at six o'clock.

The bombardment was in no sense a serious action, for the few Turkish gunners who had remained in the forts were unable to cause the smallest damage, or even inconvenience, to the Italian ships. The heterogeneous armament of the forts included eight modern Krupp guns, which varied in calibre from 7.5 to 9.4 inches, with a nominal effective range of eight thousand to nine thousand metres. Presumably the ammunition was defective, for no sort of practice was made by the Turkish gunners, and several shells failed to cover half the distance between the forts and the ships. Much may be put down to lack of skill, but the Turkish fire was too ridiculous to be accounted for by lack of skill alone. The Turks may be poor artillerymen, but they are not wholly ignorant of the way to handle a gun. In point of fact, no real attempt to fight the guns was made, and after the merest show of resistance the Turks abandoned the forts and prepared to leave the town. Most of them were already on the move before the bombardment began, and by the following day Tripoli was practically empty of Turkish troops.

The way for an Italian occupation had been satisfactorily prepared, and it was unfortunate that the troops to occupy the town were not yet on the spot. Landing parties from the ships were organised and ready, but it was realised that sixteen hundred men were not really sufficient to hold the town against the Turks, if these should decide upon giving battle, or to impress the Arab population with a proper idea of Italy's strength. Various considerations had decided the Italian Government to occupy Tobruk with all speed, and this decision implied the disregard of other



*Photo G. Brown and W. F. Riley*  
THE BOMBARDMENT. THE FIRST SHELL BURSTING ON THE  
SPANISH FORT



*Photo G. Brown and W. F. Riley*  
THE FIRST DETACHMENT OF SAILORS LANDING UNDERNEATH  
THE KONAK



pressing claims upon Italian resources. It would appear that the necessity of securing Tobruk had something to do with the diversion of Admiral Aubry's squadron from the object for which he had left Augusta, though this point has not yet been satisfactorily cleared up. In any case, the fact remains that Admiral Aubry, who had sailed eastward to intercept the Turkish fleet, was ordered to leave it unmolested and to proceed to Tobruk. On October 4, Tobruk was occupied by a landing party from the *Vittorio Emanuele*, and the first detachment of the expeditionary corps, which left Naples on the evening of October 5, was sent to Tobruk instead of to Tripoli.

The knowledge that no troops could arrive till October 11 placed Admiral Faravelli in a very difficult position. On the one hand, he had to face the fact that the landing which was expected as the natural sequel of the bombardment would place him in the uncomfortable position of having to hold, for an entire week, with under two thousand men, a defenceless town with an untrustworthy population of about forty thousand, against a possible attack from about three thousand Turkish regulars and an unknown number of Arab auxiliaries. On the other hand, the bombardment and the consequent retreat of the Turks had imposed upon him the moral obligation of preserving order in Tripoli.

On the morning of October 4 an Italian destroyer, entering the harbour under a white flag, was fired on from Fort Hamidieh. The cruiser squadron was ordered to complete the destruction of the fort, and for half an hour the three cruisers rained shells upon it, reducing it to a mere heap of ruins. There was no answering shot, and no sign of an enemy, but a small landing party was sent on shore, under cover of fire from the *Varese* and the torpedo boat *Albatros*, to put out of action any guns that might still be capable of

inflicting damage. The task was successfully accomplished, without loss, in spite of a scattered fire from a detachment of the enemy ensconced by the Tombs of the Karamanli, and the officer in charge reported that the fort was completely dismantled.

At noon a boat put out from the harbour under a white flag, and was towed to the *Benedetto Brin* by a torpedo boat. It contained the German Consul, who came to request the protection of Italian arms. He reported that the Turkish garrison had evacuated the town, and that the Arabs had begun to pillage. He feared that disturbances might ensue, and asked that the town might be occupied as soon as possible. No steps were taken that day, but on the afternoon of October 5 sixteen hundred sailors were landed under the command of Captain Cagni, and the Italian flag was planted on the *Konak*. An order was immediately issued, requiring the surrender of all arms. Five francs were offered for each rifle given up the same day, and half that sum for rifles brought during the twenty-four hours succeeding. After that time, it was intimated, arms would be confiscated without compensation.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the sum offered was too small. A rifle is generally considered to be an Arab's most cherished possession, and its value is so constant as to make it rank practically as currency. The Mausers brought in the *Derna* were of a type to induce in their possessors the utmost reluctance to part with them, and the price offered must have seemed ridiculous. Perhaps a napoleon apiece might have induced the commercially-minded Arab to accept a substantial certainty in place of the greater, but dangerous and more speculative, wealth promised by the possession of a brand new modern rifle. In any case, it would have been worth Italy's while



*Photo Captain Mola*  
TROOPS LANDING



*Photo Captain Mola*  
THE TOMBS OF THE KARAMANLI



to pay the larger sum for a better harvest. A thousand were brought in the first day, and about five hundred the second, and for some days following weapons continued to be received in lessening quantities. But many of the rifles which were given up were old and inferior, while there were many Arab muskets of the 'ornamental gas-pipe' brand. A very large number of Mausers remained in the hands of those to whom the Turks had distributed a part of the *Derna's* cargo. It was hardly possible for Captain Cagni, with the handful of troops at his disposal, to undertake a house-to-house search in the town and the oasis, but it was an unfortunate error that when the military authorities took over Tripoli from the sailors, no systematic disarmament of the population took place.

The situation in Tripoli during the week that elapsed between the landing of the sailors and the arrival of the soldiers was in fact critical. Captain Cagni worked his men to the last breath in his endeavour to make their numbers appear greater than the reality. The sailors who were marched through the streets to impress the native population were used like the members of a stage army, passing the same point two or three times, and each time posing as fresh troops ; while the patrols in the town and in the oasis made it their aim to show themselves in as many places as possible and as often as possible. Ordinary reliefs were an impossibility when each man had to do the work of three and look as though he were six. Men who patrolled the town by day watched out on the edge of the desert all night. In the town or at the trenches twelve hours was a common period of sentry-go ; food and sleep were snatched somehow, but there was little time for either. Coldly reviewed, the task which the sailors were set to perform appears in the light of an impos-

sibility. To defend a line nearly eight miles long against attack from an enemy numbering some thousands, and at the same time to police an unruly eastern town full of armed men potentially hostile, was obviously beyond the powers of the two thousand sailors who, at a pinch, could be spared from the ships. But they dared to pretend that they were masters of the situation, and the 'bluff' came off.

On the morning of October 7, when Captain Cagni and his sailors had already stamped their impression upon Tripoli, Rear-Admiral Borea Ricci disembarked and formally assumed the governorship of the town. A reception was held at the *Konak*, at which the most interesting feature was the introduction, by Hassuna Pasha Karamanli, of about a hundred Arab sheikhs and other notables, who swore fealty to the Italian Government. Hassuna Pasha Karamanli, lineal representative of the old 'Bashaws' of Tripoli and Mayor under the Turkish régime, had years before declared himself in favour of an Italian occupation, at the time of the Crispi-Salisbury correspondence already cited. The dispossession of his family by the Turkish conquest of 1835 was no old story to this vigorous Arab of seventy, and throughout his long life he had seen his race oppressed and his country despoiled by the usurping government. Nor had the Turkish authorities possessed the wit to hold him faithful by a reasonable delegation of place and power. The son of a line of powerful princes was titular Mayor of Tripoli, and lived on a pension which did not come within reasonable distance of satisfying his Oriental tastes. Personal reasons could only make him hate the Turks, and racial reasons tended in the same direction. In common with many other intelligent Arabs he saw that Turkish rule was crushing his people out of

existence, and failing the prospect of independence he welcomed an alternative domination. He has been called an arch-traitor by one or two hasty writers. The term seems misapplied. Hassuna Pasha was not a Turk, and he owed nothing to the Turks. On the contrary, they stood heavily in debt to him and to his race.

Receptions took place ; the town seemed quiet ; the shops were all re-opened and plying their trades ; the Europeans in Tripoli went about their business freely and confidently, and the band of the *Benedetto Brin* played opposite the *Konak*. The illusion of peace and safety was all but complete. But as the days went on and no troops arrived ; when the sailors could no longer disguise their paucity of numbers ; when it was realised that Turkish spies passed freely in and out of the town, to the east and west where the sailors could make no pretence of prolonging their thin line, the Arabs began to show themselves uneasy, and the authorities realised that something was afoot. The 'something,' of course, had been foreseen from the first. As soon as the Turks obtained news of the slender force which garrisoned Tripoli, they were bound to return and make an attempt upon the town.

Three days passed without an attack, though nocturnal alarms were frequent. During the night of the fourth day, a little before dawn on October 9, a small force of the enemy tried a 'feeler' at the Bu Meliana position, and on the day following informers brought word that an attack in greater force was planned for the next night. The waterworks of Bu Meliana formed a natural objective for a Turkish attack, and Captain Cagni concentrated nearly half of his available men in the neighbourhood of this point. The expected attack came at 1.15, but it was only a reconnaissance. Firing went on briskly for forty

minutes, and the Italians spread out to make their line look as long as possible, but the Turks made no attempt to press the attack home. The Italians suffered no casualties, but in the morning four Turks were found, three dead and one wounded, at about three hundred yards from the trenches. The wounded man reported that the attack had been made by an advance guard of five hundred men, and that the main Turkish force had concentrated at Azizia and was moving on Tripoli. Further reinforcements, consisting of four hundred men and eight 3-inch guns, were landed from the ships, and a detachment was posted on the eastern lines, where rumour foretold the possibility of an attack in the early morning, between moonset and sunrise. But the anxious night passed quietly, and at dawn the first transports appeared off Tripoli. The landing of the troops began in the afternoon, and by the evening all had been disembarked and hurried out to the edge of the desert, a total of nearly five thousand men.

On the following day the main body of transports arrived, and eight thousand men were landed. The sailors had done their work, and that afternoon they re-embarked, after being reviewed and thanked by Admiral Borea Ricci. All honour is due to Captain Cagni and his men for the qualities which they displayed during the first days of the occupation. They had no hard fighting and gained no bloody victories. But their high spirit and unwearying vigilance throughout a long and critical week, the cheerfulness and zest with which they performed their arduous duties of watch and ward, have rightly earned them the highest praise from those in a position to appreciate the situation.

The majority of the sailors returned to the fleet, but two detachments which had landed with the guns were left on shore until the artillery could be disembarked.

Rough weather had delayed the landing operations, and it was not until October 15 that it was thought prudent to attempt the disembarkation of the cavalry and artillery. For this reason the eight naval guns landed on October 10 were left at the trenches, four at Bu Meliana and four at the end of the road which leads past the Cavalry Barracks into the open desert. The delay gave the sailors one more chance. Early on the morning of October 14 a small body of Turks, probably the detachment which had attacked before, came up over the dunes towards Bu Meliana. They were readily repulsed by rifle and artillery fire, and retired under cover of the darkness, leaving behind them three dead bodies, a Hotchkiss quick-firing gun, a quantity of ammunition, and a few rifles. Two Italian soldiers were wounded.

Meanwhile, on October 13, Lieutenant-General Caneva, the Commander-in-chief of the expeditionary force, had assumed the Governorship of Tripoli, replacing Admiral Borea Ricci, who returned to the command of his squadron. Bad weather continued, but by October 16 all the guns and cavalry had been landed, and the greater part of the stores and *matériel*. By October 20 the fleet of transports was empty, and Italy's principal base in Tripolitania was well established.

With Tripoli and Tobruk safe in Italian hands, the other main positions included in the plan of occupation were quickly attacked and taken. On October 16 an Italian squadron, consisting of the *Napoli*, *Pisa*, *Amalfi*, *San Marco*<sup>1</sup> and *Agordat*, with two destroyers, escorting a number of transports, appeared off Derna. A deputation of Arabs requested that the city might not be bombarded, as the Turkish garrison was small, and could not put up

<sup>1</sup> An armoured cruiser of the *Amalfi* type, with certain minor differences.

any show of resistance. The Turks, however, refused to surrender the town, which suffered considerably from the bombardment which followed. All things considered, it might have been politic to spare the town, and so avoid embittering the feelings of the Arabs. The bombardment took place on the 16th, but a heavy sea prevented the landing of troops either that day or the next, and on the 18th, after a strong detachment of sailors had occupied the town, a recurrence of bad weather put a stop to the landing of the troops when one company of engineers had been disembarked. Landing operations were resumed on the 19th and continued, under considerable difficulties, for three days following. Desultory fighting went on during these days, and the taking of Derna cost the Italians seventy killed and wounded. The Turks and Arabs were reported to have lost about two hundred killed.

On October 16 six transports, escorted by the cruiser *Varese* and one torpedo boat, left Tripoli for Homs, having on board the 8th regiment of Bersaglieri, eighteen hundred strong. The expedition arrived at Homs on the morning of the 17th. The Turks refused to surrender, and a short bombardment followed. Heavy weather prevented a landing, but the small Turkish garrison retired from the town. On the 20th it was intimated to the Italians that the Turks had evacuated the town, and that the population requested Italian protection, but it was not until the following day that a landing could be effected. Two serious encounters took place subsequently, on October 23 and 28, in which the Arabs, according to the published reports, lost four hundred killed. These severe lessons had their effect, and no further fighting of any importance took place for a considerable time.

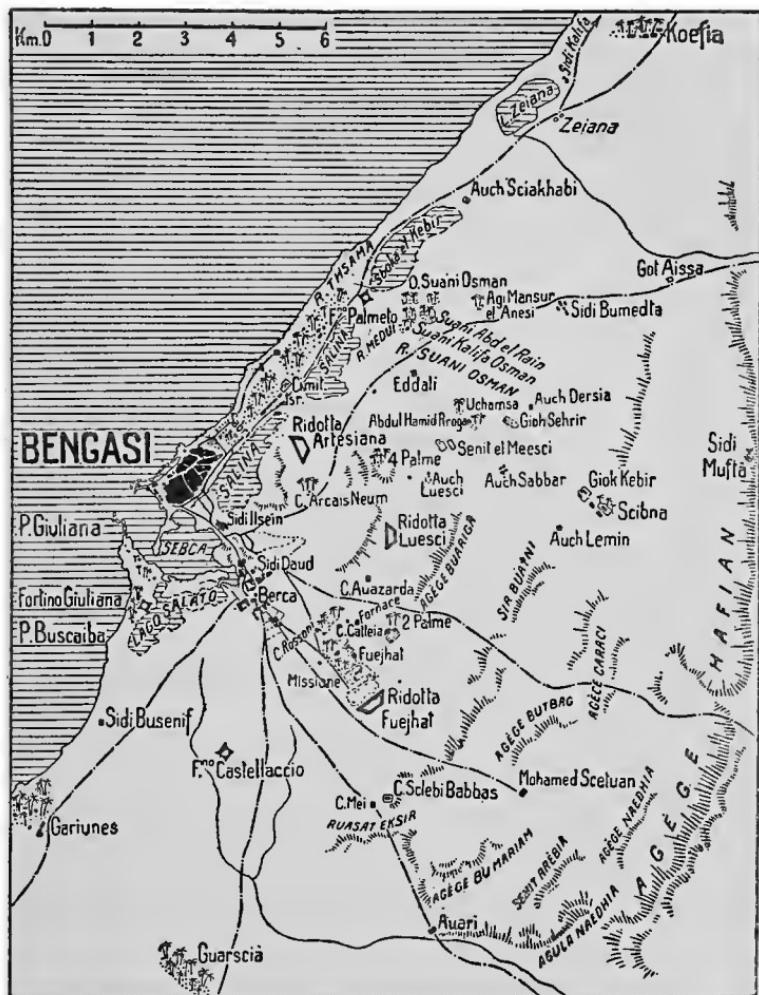
The occupation of Tripoli, Tobruk, Derna, and Homs was

effected without serious resistance, but the landing at Benghazi and the taking of the town constituted an operation on a different scale, attended with great difficulties and considerable loss. On the morning of October 18 the main body of the Italian fleet, under Admiral Aubry, appeared off Benghazi, escorting the second division of the expeditionary force, under the command of General Briccola. The usual demand for surrender was met by the usual refusal, but the further procedure differed widely from that adopted in the case of the other coast towns. The whole of the 18th was occupied by an examination of the coast and by preparations for landing, and on the following morning the bombardment and the landing operations were simultaneously begun. The day had dawned rough and threatening, and soon rain was falling heavily. At 7.30 the ships opened fire. Their aim was directed upon four different points : the beach lying immediately south of the port of Benghazi, which had been selected as the landing-place for the troops ; the neighbourhood of the Berka barracks ; a large magazine to the north of the town ; and the precincts of the Governor's residence. The fire of the ships was specially arranged to cover the landing of the troops, and to inflict as little damage as possible upon the town.

A detachment of sailors, as usual, took the lead in the landing operations, and they succeeded in disembarking, unopposed, a little before nine o'clock. They speedily occupied the dunes which faced the beach, and two 3-inch guns were posted on their left, near the little Christian cemetery on Point Giuliana (see map). An hour later the first detachment of troops reached the shore and landed under fire. Major-General Ameglio, who landed with them, ordered the sailors to push forward beyond the first line

of dunes, so as to cover the landing operations more effectively, and permit the troops to form up under cover. The advance of the sailors was met by a hot fire from the enemy, who were strongly posted on the narrow neck of uneven ground between the Sibbah, a shallow lagoon running inland from the port, and the salt marsh which lies to the south of it. This was their main position, but their firing line extended diagonally almost to Point Buscaiba, at the southern end of the beach chosen for the Italian landing-place. The sailors were soon heavily engaged, and General Ameglio hurried forward supports as they landed—a company and a half of the 63rd regiment and a half-company of the 4th—who strengthened the right of the Italian line, and kept down the enemy's fire.

The Turks realised too late that they ought to have occupied the high ground on Point Giuliana, from which point of vantage they could have enfiladed the whole of the beach. They had occupied the north-eastern shore of the promontory, and from this point they attacked the two guns posted by the cemetery, and were only driven back by fire from the ships. At 11.30 the sailors were reinforced by two companies of the 63rd, and a similar detachment of the 4th was sent to Point Buscaiba, to cover the Italian right flank. By noon two mountain batteries had been disembarked, without their mules, and the guns had been conveyed by hand to commanding positions on the dunes. At 12.30 p.m., when General Briccola landed, the disposition of the troops, according to the official report, was as follows: 'A strong detachment of the 4th regiment and some sailors were entrenched at the south end of the beach on the rising ground near Point Buscaiba, facing south and east. Between the salt lake and the beach



BENGHAZI AND ENVIRONS



a mountain battery was in action, with the main body of the 4th regiment forming up close by. Between this battery and the rising ground on Point Giuliana were the main body of the sailors, detachments of the 4th and 63rd, and the second mountain battery. On the high ground at Point Giuliana were two companies of the 63rd.'

The force detailed for the day's operations consisted of five battalions (three of the 4th and two of the 63rd) and two batteries, but four companies of the 63rd and nearly a battalion of the 4th were still on board the transports. The weather had grown steadily worse, and the landing of the troops was becoming increasingly difficult. Ammunition was running short, but a fresh supply was on the point of being landed. In the circumstances General Briccola decided to delay any further advance till 3.30, when it was anticipated that the rest of the infantry, proper medical services, and an ample supply of ammunition, would have been disembarked. During this period of waiting the troops were instructed to reserve their fire as much as possible.

The objective of the Italian attack was the barracks of Berka, and the plan of advance was as follows : A column, consisting of the main body of the sailors and a mixed battalion of the 4th and 63rd, was to advance direct upon Berka by way of the strip of marshy land which separates the Sibbah from the salt pools, a strip which narrows to about two hundred yards in front of the barracks. A second column, consisting of two battalions of the 4th regiment, was to traverse the salt marsh by way of a wider tract of dry ground which cuts it in two, and to swing in upon Berka from the south. The advance was to be supported by the mountain batteries, which could not, however,

accompany the infantry owing to the fact that it had not been possible to land the mules.

The attack succeeded perfectly, after a stiff struggle at the neck of land between the Sibbah and the salt marsh. Berka was occupied as the sun was setting, and before darkness fell the Italians had pushed on past Sidi Daud to Sidi Hussein, on the outskirts of Benghazi itself. An admirable day's work was thus brought to a successful close.

In the gathering darkness the enemy rallied, and poured a heavy fire on the Italian troops. With the object of crushing this last effort at resistance General Briccola signalled to the fleet to resume the bombardment. Searchlights were directed upon the town, and for a short time the naval guns flashed and thundered again, till a white flag was run up on the Governor's residence. During this second bombardment both the Italian and British Consulates were hit and severely damaged, and a number of neutrals and non-combatants lost their lives. The fact of the British Consulate being hit was greatly regretted by the Italians, and it is unfortunate that the incident was made the excuse for some ill-tempered questions in the House of Commons. It should not be hard for all but the most acid critics to realise the difficulties of the situation. The British Consulate was in line with one of the Turkish positions, and bombardment by searchlight must naturally increase the margin of error.

On the following day, October 20, the town of Benghazi was occupied. The Italian casualties were one officer and twenty-two men killed, and nine officers and seventy-seven men wounded. The enemy's loss was estimated at nearly two hundred killed, but the figure is only an estimate. It is probable, however, that the Turks and Arabs suffered



VIEW TOWARDS BENGHAZI FROM THE BERKIA BARRACKS, INCLUDING SIDI DAUD, SIDI HUSSEIN, AND  
THE SIBBAH, OR SIBKAH

*Photo Comerio, Milan*



considerably, for the stubborn resistance to the landing of the Italians was followed by a long period of quiet.

In Tripoli, meanwhile, there seemed no early prospect of serious fighting. The force destined for the occupation had been successfully disembarked, and some ten thousand rifles<sup>1</sup> were available for the defence of the long lines which encircled the town. Stores, ammunition, aeroplanes, war *matériel* of every description, had been landed by October 20, and rumour began to speak of an advance towards the interior as the next military operation. The situation seemed so peaceful that on the morning of October 21 several correspondents, Italian and foreign, left for Benghazi, which promised greater interest. They were not allowed to land, and before they could return to Tripoli the whole face of the campaign was altered.

<sup>1</sup> Three battalions of Bersaglieri and eleven line battalions.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE REVOLT OF OCTOBER 23 AND ITS SEQUEL

THE events of October 23 and the four days following, important enough in themselves, have acquired an additional, extrinsic, interest from the consequences to which they gave rise. In the first place, the reports of the Italian suppressive measures which were sent home by certain correspondents created considerable excitement in Europe. In the second place, the experience of those critical days must be held to have influenced profoundly the subsequent course of operations. These considerations make it impossible to avoid dealing fully with a series of incidents which, in other circumstances, might have been passed over without special emphasis.

In order to understand the events under discussion, a rough idea of the scene of the conflict is essential, and it is hoped that the map of Tripoli and its environs will make things clear where words may be obscure.

Inland from the town of Tripoli, and all along the coast to the east, lies the oasis, a bewildering labyrinth of palm-gardens, orchards, and olive-groves, intersected by sandy roads and innumerable winding paths. The roads are lined, and the gardens are divided, by sun-baked earthen walls, or huge hedges of prickly pear. Low Arab houses cluster here and there by the roadside, occasionally forming a group large enough to be called a village ; and everywhere there are seen the tall twin staircase-like erections



A TYPICAL ROAD IN THE OASIS



AN ARAB WELL  
*Photo Captain Mola*



that mark an Arab well. It would be hard to find an uglier terrain for an unexpected fight, or one more easy for an insidious and desperate enemy, who knew the ground, to employ to the best advantage. This network of gardens extends inland from Tripoli for little more than a mile, to the edge of the wide steppe that people call the desert ; and on the west and south the Italian lines looked out upon open ground, broken and undulating, that gives good cover here and there, but does not lend itself to a surprise. To the eastward of Tripoli, on the other hand, the oasis stretches along the coast for a dozen miles, a strip of luxuriant growth that varies from one to two miles in width. On this side of the Italian position the main attack of October 23 was developed ; here the hardest fighting of the war took place, and here the Italians lost a greater number of killed than in all the other engagements of the first six months.

The Italian troops, after the landing of the expeditionary force, were disposed as follows : The right, or westward, segment of the defensive line, extending from Fort Sultanieh nearly to Bu Meliana, was held by General Giardina's brigade of four battalions, two of the 6th and two of the 40th regiments. The centre position from Bu Meliana to Fort Messri was occupied by General Rainaldi's brigade, consisting of the 82nd and 84th regiments—five battalions in all, the third battalion of the 82nd being held in reserve at Tripoli. The important Bu Meliana position was strongly held by the 84th regiment, who occupied the trenches as far as the villa which had belonged to Djemal Bey, chief Turkish staff-officer in the *vilayet* of Tripoli ; while the rest of the line, running past the Agricultural College to Fort Messri and the edge of the oasis, was held by the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 82nd. From the edge of the oasis to the sea, a front of nearly two miles was occupied by the

three battalions of the 11th Bersaglieri, a force of about eighteen hundred men.<sup>1</sup> The right of the position was held by the 1st and 3rd battalions, the headquarters of the regiment being the broad open plateau of El Hanni, while the 2nd battalion was on the left, between El Hanni and the sea, with its headquarters at Sharashat. The El Hanni position was strongly entrenched and practically secure from assault; but the battalion on the left was scattered loosely along a comparatively lengthy front. It is evident, both from the disposition of the troops, and from all available information, that no serious attack was expected from the eastern side. For nearly a fortnight the Turks and Arabs had been threatening the western and southern fronts. The oasis had been perfectly quiet, and a sense of false security had arisen.

On the morning of October 23 the Bersaglieri were disposed as follows: on the right, the 3rd, 7th, and 9th companies held the lines, with the rest of the 1st and 3rd battalions in reserve, some distance in the rear; on the left the 4th and 5th companies were disposed in two lines, advanced posts and main body, while the 6th company was in reserve.

The Turco-Arab attack began at 8 A.M., all along the line from west to east. But the advances upon the western and southern fronts were only feints, containing movements which were not pushed home. By ten o'clock the attacking forces, many of them Arab horsemen, had retired, and were lost sight of in the undulating ground of the desert. But heavy firing continued on the eastern front, and before long alarming rumours began to reach Tripoli. It was reported that the Turks and the desert Arabs had crumpled the Italian left, and were on the point of entering the town.

<sup>1</sup> A Bersaglieri battalion contains only three double companies.

For a short time an extreme panic prevailed among the greater part of the population. The Jews of the *Harra* in particular filled the narrow streets with lamenting crowds, who pressed down towards the harbour with some wild hope of escape by sea. In the Bread Market, among the crowd of Arabs who swarm there every morning, the excitement was intense. Shots were fired from one or two *fonduks*; the knots of lounging men at the doors of the Arab cafés swayed and broke up and scattered. A clamour of voices filled the air, imploring, cursing, inciting—for there were some who gave a call to arms, crying, ‘Death to the Christians.’ ‘Why do you not come and fight?’ Some few had the courage, or perhaps it was fear of the Turk that spurred them, to fire upon Italian soldiers in the street, or to attack them with sticks and knives. Some soldiers were killed, some wounded, and it was one of the latter who was knifed by a *kavass* of the German Consulate.<sup>1</sup>

The panic and confusion were extreme while they lasted, but in a comparatively short time some measure of calm was restored. Every one was driven out of the streets into the first house that could serve as a refuge, and during this hurried clearing of the town there was some wild firing on the part of the Italian troops. This firing appears, in the main, to have been directed into the air, and to have been in the nature of a threat. Sometimes the threat had to

<sup>1</sup> It is typical of the bitterness with which some correspondents thought fit to attack the Italians, that the justice of this man’s execution was questioned. The evidence given at the trial conclusively proved his guilt, and there were others who witnessed the murder, who saw him leave the Consulate, saw him assassinate the wounded soldier, saw him return and thrust the dripping blade of his knife into a brazier of charcoal. Some people’s susceptibilities appear to have been offended by the hurry of his trial and execution. It seems useless to insist that, under martial law in an Eastern city, procedure is not to be judged by those rigid standards which rightly govern the exaction of the death penalty in England,

be carried into execution, and it seems likely that the only people who were shot in the town were those who had drawn a just, or at least a natural suspicion upon themselves. Various Arabs were found in the streets, brandishing arms and uttering wild cries. Some of these were promptly shot, and in the circumstances no soldiery could have been expected to refrain from shooting. In a large number of cases the Italians did refrain, and many men were disarmed and imprisoned whose summary execution would have been fully justified under martial law.

Meanwhile, though the Arabs from the desert were not really on the point of entering the city, and never actually threatened to do so in any numbers, yet they had in fact cleared a way, and could have come straight in by the Sharashat Road. For the 4th and 5th companies of the Bersaglieri had been practically swept out of existence, and the 6th company had moved up to support the line just to the left of El Hanni. Between the Amruss Road and the sea the way lay open to the outskirts of the town, the Imperial Barracks, and the Tuesday Market. In the oasis, as on the other fronts, the attack began at 8 A.M. Posted behind walls and trees, and, at El Hanni, comfortably entrenched, the Italian troops were defending their position coolly and effectively, when they found themselves assailed from behind. The three companies occupying the plateau of El Hanni were comparatively well placed. They were entrenched, and the force of the attack on their rear was greatly diminished by the fact that their reserve companies, and later a battalion of the 82nd, which was sent to reinforce the eastern front, kept the Arabs behind the trenches heavily engaged. The 4th and 5th companies were in a very different position. They were more scattered, and less strongly posted ; and their reserve company, the



THE BREAD-MARKET, WITH THE KONAK IN THE BACKGROUND



A VIEW OF THE BREAD-MARKET FROM A ROOF



6th, hard pressed by the fire of Arabs from behind and by the irruption of many who had broken through the advance lines, was fighting its way slowly towards El Hanni. The 4th and 5th companies stood their ground bravely ; but the odds were too heavy. At the end of the day, out of four hundred men fifty-seven answered the regimental roll-call. The rest were killed, wounded, or missing, and in Arab warfare those in the first category are apt to be the most fortunate. The 6th and 8th companies also lost heavily, and the casualties among the other five companies were considerable. In all, the regiment lost about a third of its number, killed, wounded, or missing. But the gallant defence of El Hanni had saved the situation. The leaders of the attacking forces had felt the necessity of capturing this dominant position before pushing on into the city. Thanks to Colonel Fara and his men the attempt failed, and the strategic wisdom of the Turkish leaders saved Tripoli from a scene of ghastly carnage. If the Turks and Arabs had poured into Tripoli by way of Shara Zauiet or Dahra, no doubt the Italians would have finally succeeded in expelling or destroying them, but with the greatest difficulty and at an immense sacrifice of life. For the Arabs from outside would have found help in the town, as they found it in the oasis, and many hours, or even days, of fierce street-fighting would have followed. The behaviour of Colonel Fara's regiment has been justly eulogised by all who were in a position to estimate the critical nature of the position, and the coolness and steadiness displayed. The words of the *Times* special correspondent, an experienced and competent eyewitness, are sufficient testimony to the truth : 'I wish again to put on record from ocular demonstration the splendid manner in which the young Italian infantry in the danger zone on Monday coped

with a situation which would have tried the oldest soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

All day the struggle raged round El Hanni, and the reinforcing troops found themselves compelled to fight their way to the front. The reserve companies succeeded by degrees in reaching the main firing line, but the half-battalion of the 82nd which was sent to El Hanni was less fortunate. Two companies of the battalion arrived safely at Messri, but the other two were stopped at midday, and remained all afternoon by the village of Feschlum, unable to force their way farther. Towards evening the resistance slackened and they were able to push on to El Hanni. But the Bersaglieri had held their own, and the enemy were already in retreat. Fresh troops were pushed forward through the oasis to fill the gap caused by the practical destruction of the two companies of Bersaglieri at Sharashat, and to strengthen the eastern line generally. Shots were still fired in the oasis, but only sporadically. It was realised that both attack and revolt had failed.

On the day following the revolt there began the systematic clearing of the oasis, and the summary reprisals, which form the main subject of this chapter. But before commenting on the orders given, or the methods of carrying them out, or the legends which have grown up round the doings of those days, it seems advisable to complete the bare narrative of the main events, down to the drawing in of the Italian lines.

On October 24 and 25, Italian troops were continuously engaged in clearing the oasis of its inhabitants, and in shooting those who resisted, or were found bearing arms. But it must be remembered that the work they had to do was no mere house-to-house visitation, varied by frequent

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, October 28, 1911.

executions. It was a piece of patrol work, marked by a number of sharp little skirmishes, in which the Italian soldiers were continually fired upon by desperate, hunted men. Before the oasis was fully cleared, the attack on October 26 gave an opportunity to a number of stragglers to try and repeat the programme of the 23rd. But by the evening of October 27 the task was practically completed. Several thousand Arabs had been brought into Tripoli, and of these some two thousand five hundred were deported to Tremiti and Ustica.<sup>1</sup>

The Turco-Arab attack on October 26 resolved itself into two main operations: another vigorous attempt to carry the position at El Hanni, and a determined onslaught upon the trenches between Bu Meliana and the Cavalry Barracks. Fighting began before dawn, all along the line from El Hanni to Bu Meliana, and continued for nearly six hours. The attack on El Hanni, which appears to have been directed, and in part conducted, by Turkish regulars, was fierce and prolonged, especially on the Italian left, where a turning movement was attempted. Groups of Arabs endeavoured to take the position by storm, under cover of a heavy fire from the palms, and a number of them actually reached the trenches. But the Bersaglieri, reinforced by a detachment of sailors from the *Sicilia*, a field battery and a company of fortress artillery, had no difficulty in holding their own, and inflicting heavy loss upon the attacking forces. At half-past eight the bulk of the enemy withdrew, leaving only a few 'snipers.' Along the line from the edge of the oasis to the Cavalry Barracks road the attack was not really pressed home. The ground

<sup>1</sup> The fact that thousands of Arabs were brought into Tripoli was deliberately ignored by Italy's critics. The public was informed that the oasis was cleared by massacre.

is open there, and less undulating than it is farther west ; the trenches were not seriously threatened, and the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 82nd regiment, who were supported by artillery, were able to spare reinforcements for the Bersaglieri on their left.

In the meantime, things were going less well with the 84th regiment. They were occupying a long line of more than two kilometres. Two companies had been detached on the 24th, to strengthen the eastern front, and special attention was necessarily concentrated on Bu Meliana, where the waterworks presented an important objective to the enemy. Between the Cavalry Barracks and Bu Meliana the line was not very strongly held, and a specially weak point was the salient angle formed by an olive grove which projected from the oasis into the open ground, just by the Villa of Djemal Bey. At this point the line was rushed by a large number of Arabs, in spite of a gallant resistance by the defenders. They took cover immediately and opened a flanking fire on the troops in the trenches, who suffered considerably, and were hard put to it to prevent larger numbers of the enemy pouring through the breach in their lines. A battalion of the 82nd and two dismounted squadrons of the Lodi cavalry were hurried up in support, and though the Arabs who had penetrated into the oasis fought hard, and inflicted considerable loss on the reinforcing troops, these succeeded in cutting up their adversaries and reaching the critical point in time. Stiff fighting took place at the trenches, but by half-past ten the enemy were driven off, having lost heavily.

Though the Italian position had been successfully defended, their lines had been broken twice in four days, and it was decided that they should relinquish the attempt to hold so long a front. Fort Messri and El Hanni were



*Photo A. Malvezzi*

MONUMENT ERECTED NEAR THE HOUSE OF DJEMAL BEY, TO THE SOLDIERS  
OF 84TH REGIMENT, KILLED ON OCTOBER 26TH, 1911



*Photo A. Malvezzi*

FESCHLUM



abandoned, and the new line of defence on the eastern side ran straight from Sidi Messri to the sea.

For some time it was rumoured that the revolt which broke out on the 23rd was premature, and that it had really been timed for the more general attack which was made three days later. The evidence does not seem to favour this suggestion ; in fact, it points rather the other way—to the supposition that a rising of Tripoli Arabs had been fixed for the 23rd by pre-arrangement with the Turks and Arabs outside. Some effort has been made to ridicule the idea of any revolt at all, or at least to deny that it was premeditated. The evidence is contradictory and uncertain, but that there was some pre-arrangement would seem to be perfectly obvious, and many facts may be quoted in favour of this contention. In the first place, the beginning of the attack from behind coincided too nearly with the attack from outside to admit of any other explanation. The Bersaglieri had scarcely settled down to defend themselves before they were assailed from behind ; and in point of fact, it seems that the very first shots fired on the morning of the 23rd were fired at one of the Red Cross encampments to the rear of the Sharashat position. The personnel of the Red Cross were going about their work, and there was no suspicion of any attack, when they were suddenly fired at by two Arabs who were sitting astride of the wall that encircled their encampment. There are other cases which go to prove the same thesis, but it is unnecessary to quote more than one or two of particular interest. During the earliest minutes of the attack, the captain in command of one of the reserve companies of Bersaglieri was stabbed by an Arab boy of twelve who had been his servant since the occupation. At the moment, the officer was sitting coatless in front of his tent, preparing

some food for the boy's sister, who had been ill. Another fact of particular interest is that stray shots were fired at Italian soldiers on the Bu Meliana road before 8.30 in the morning, when the feigned attack on Bu Meliana was in progress, a time which precludes the suggestion that all firing from behind was the work of Arabs from outside who had succeeded in penetrating the scattered lines at Sharashat. These facts are significant, but there is more definite evidence of an attempt on the part of the Turks to arrange a simultaneous attack and revolt. Three days before, the authorities had been warned that an Arab rising was being organised, and Colonel Fara had declared himself uneasy as to the mood of the natives in the oasis. Extra precautions were taken in the city, but the real danger-points were not realised, and in fact it may be said that the warnings were not believed.

The i's were dotted by a Tripoli Arab named Hassan ben Mohammed (not a very distinctive name), whose trial for *tradimento* took place soon after my arrival in Tripoli. Hassan had been found in the oasis on October 23, in very suspicious circumstances. He realised, perhaps, that he had compromised himself too deeply to escape, for he made a clear and detailed confession. He stated that on October 22 a certain *fonduk* which he frequented had been visited by a man dressed as an Arab, whom he knew to be a Turkish non-commissioned officer. This man supplied him and others with Mausers, which had been hidden in the *fonduk*, and explained their mechanism, for the Arabs knew only the use of their own native muskets. So far the story was perfectly straightforward, but he faltered when he was asked to explain his presence in the oasis, and said he had not wished to fire against the Italians.

Why then did he go to the oasis on the 23rd ?

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To work in a garden that he owned. Indeed he had not wished to take up arms against the Italians, but he found himself in the midst of others who were firing, including the Turk who had given him the rifle. These compelled him to join them, and for his life's sake he had consented.

But he knew that a revolt in the oasis was planned for the 23rd ? Yes.

Yet he had chosen that morning to go and work in his garden ? Yes.

And he had taken the new rifle with him ? Yes.

Hassan gave his evidence very well, and it is probable that he spoke nothing but the truth when he said that he had not wished to take up arms against the Italians, but had been compelled to do so by fear. From the mass of conflicting evidence which obscures the question, two facts would seem to emerge clearly. The first is that the Tripoli Arabs taken as a whole had no wish whatever to revolt against the Italian occupation. The second is that a considerable proportion of them did in fact take part in the revolt, though it is probable that only a few had any previous knowledge of what was going to happen. It would seem that the Turkish emissaries who had come disguised into Tripoli (for Arabs were allowed to pass freely in and out of the town during the first days of the occupation) were very careful in their selection of accomplices. They understood that they could not rely upon a universal, or even a widespread, sympathy with the cause they represented, and they counted upon the coercion of fear, or the sudden incitement to fanaticism, to accomplish the end they had in view.

In point of fact it would appear that in the main the Tripoli revolt was engineered and actually started by Arabs who did not belong to Tripoli, or even to the Tripoli district.

At all times in the town of Tripoli there is a floating population of Arabs, Berbers, and blacks from the interior, or from the lesser known coast villages. These people, more ignorant and more savage than the comparatively sophisticated dweller round Tripoli, obviously afford much better material than the Tripolitan for the incitement to discord and the preaching of fanaticism—much better material, for they had suffered less from the Turk and knew less of the Italian. Among the Arabs of Tripoli, and particularly among the educated class, there are no illusions as to the benefits of Turkish domination. But in the remoter districts community of religion, coupled with a wholesome fear of Turkish military power, would naturally prevail over less obvious considerations.

At all times there is a floating population in Tripoli, but in the month of October the influx of non-resident Arabs reaches its highest point. For in that month the oasis is full of desert Arabs who come in for the date harvest—Arabs from Tarhuna, Berbers and blacks from distant and less favoured oases, nomad Bedouins from the unkindly steppes. Some had already arrived before the Italian occupation. Others had come in through the lines on the eastern front, freely and unmolested. For it was the policy of the Italian authorities to interfere as little as possible with Arab trade and Arab movement. At that date they believed that Arab hatred of the Turk would outweigh Arab distrust of the Roum.

The position reveals itself clearly : the Italians unsuspecting, watching only for the Turk ; the Tripoli Arabs nervous and uncertain, fearing the return of their old masters, for rumours were filtering in from outside—fearing, too, attacks from the Arabs of the desert ; the wild and fanatical desert tribesmen, primed by the Turks, hating



SHARASHAT

*Photo G. Della Guerardescu*



the Christians, afraid for their religion and their women. The Turkish emissaries had an easy task. They had only to prepare the stranger Arabs in Tripoli and the oasis, those immediately in contact with them, and one or two chiefs of the oasis whom the Turks had placed in a specially privileged position. The rest could safely be left to the constraining power of example and fear. The Arabs who desired nothing better than peace and quiet would be swept into the conflict against their will. And this is exactly what happened.

The revolt was begun by the desert tribesmen, or by the comparatively few fanatical Arabs of the oasis. It was fanned by the irruption of the Arabs who broke through the lines at Sharashat, and many took part in it who were impelled solely by force of circumstances. It was most general, as was only natural, in the eastern part of the oasis, that part which was least strongly held, where the Arab population, temporary and permanent, was thickest, and where the Italian troops were comparatively few in number. But all day long firing went on in the neighbourhood of the Cavalry Barracks, and small parties of Italian soldiers were attacked even westward of Bu Meliana, and on the outskirts of the city. Nor does the fact of the main outbreak being on the eastern side preclude the possibility of Arabs from other parts of the oasis having taken part in the rising. The case of Hassan ben Mohammed shows clearly that those Arabs who were in communication with the Turkish authorities were told to be in a particular part of the oasis on the morning in question. A rising behind the lines at Bu Meliana, where no attack was pressed home, would have been purposeless and futile. The animating idea was evidently to destroy the Italian left, occupy El Hanni, and go straight in upon the city. To that end it may fairly be

presumed that all the Arabs who were 'in the know' were directed to concentrate behind the Bersaglieri, and on the approaches to the eastern front. In any case, after the crisis of October 23 it would not have been legitimate for the Italian authorities to take any further chances. The whole oasis had to be cleared, and a lesson had to be taught.

In judging the reprisals which followed the revolt, it is essential to be alive to the facts of the situation. I have endeavoured to outline the events of the day, and to show that General Caneva and the Italian troops were face to face with a grave danger. In the circumstances the first duty of a commanding general was to take whatever steps he thought necessary to prevent the recurrence of such a crisis. The justice of such a suggestion is well understood by all soldiers, and the following quotation may help to carry conviction to the civilian mind. The words quoted were written by Bluntschli, the famous authority upon international law, and they have reference to the Instructions for the Government of the Armies of the United States in the Field, which were drawn up by Dr. Francis Lieber, and formed the first codification of International Articles of War.

' Everywhere reigns in this body of law the spirit of humanity. . . . But at the same time our legislator remains fully aware that in time of war it is absolutely necessary to provide for the safety of armies and for the successful conduct of a campaign ; that, to those engaged in it, the harshest measures and the most reckless exactions cannot be denied, and that tender-hearted sentimentality is here all the more out of place, because the greater the energy employed in carrying on the war, the sooner will it be brought to an end, and the normal condition of peace restored.'

It is perfectly clear that in accordance with all law and practice relating to the conduct of war, stern measures were not only permissible but necessary. In an examination of the methods of repression adopted, we have to consider first of all whether the orders given by General Caneva transgressed in any way the rules and usages of ordinary warfare; and secondly, whether in carrying out these orders the Italian soldiers made them an excuse for a wholesale massacre of innocent people. These are, in effect, the charges which have been brought against the Italian Army. I believe them to be demonstrably false.

Two sets of charges were brought against General Caneva. First, that he had treated as rebels Arabs who could claim the rights of belligerents, men who were simply fighting for their country; and second, that even if the Arabs were rebels he had given an order which rebellion itself did not justify—that all Arabs found in the oasis should be shot.

Both these charges may be dismissed very shortly. All the local Arabs within the Italian lines had made formal submission, either personally, or through their chiefs. Many of them had been clothed and fed and medically tended during the days which followed the occupation, and they had undoubtedly lost belligerent rights. Moreover, both they and those Arabs from outside who had never made technical submission, but were within the Italian lines, are covered by the rule as to 'occupied territory.' All of these who took up arms against the Italians were technically rebels.

The second charge was made explicitly by at least one correspondent, but it appears to be absolutely without foundation. Impartial investigation will find no trace of such an order, and General Caneva has categorically denied

that it was ever issued. The correspondent who made the charge has never given any authority for his assertion, and I think we may take it that the story of this blood-thirsty order has no foundation in fact. It may have been the subject of a flying rumour, but flying rumours ought not to be used as the basis of grave charges. The orders actually given to the troops were to this effect: that the oasis should be cleared, and that those found in arms against the Italians should be shot. Obviously, such orders left room for individual discretion or indiscretion, but these are the orders that were given, orders that were both natural and necessary. Further, a decree was published on October 23, proclaiming that all arms in the possession of the natives had to be deposited at one of various Carabinieri stations, or given up on demand to search-parties. Contravention of this decree was to be punished according to Italian law.

In the circumstances it can hardly be said by any but the most determined pacifists and humanitarians, that the orders given were in any sense too harsh. And to these it is not possible to address an argument. For they will not recognise that war is war; and that in all war certain conduct is universally, and justly, held to merit certain punishment.

It is admitted that the plan of reprisal was severe, and it must be admitted also that in its execution there were cases of error and excess, where individual soldiers or parties of soldiers made mistakes or got out of hand. These cases of excess have been incredibly magnified and distorted, and the conclusion I wish to sustain is that while the severity was fully justified, the errors and excesses, however regrettable and blamable, were not unnatural or altogether unpardonable. I have not found that any

in with whom I have spoken on the subject claims  
other verdict on the events.

picture of the situation may furnish explanation and  
se : the soldiers at the front overwhelmed in a hell of  
, defending themselves desperately against a half-  
enemy ; reinforcements struggling through a maze  
ardens, fired on from all sides, from houses, from  
ques, from behind walls, from palms, from wells ; and  
er the city groups of soldiers from the medical, trans-  
and commissariat corps, waiting the reported coming  
e Arabs, actually fired on by stray parties which had  
the main bodies and pushed forward in hope of loot.

the scene of this critical situation : a network of  
urds and gardens, split up by narrow roads and winding  
, where the radius of vision varies from a hundred  
s to five ; a district closely populated in parts, where  
abitants and non-combatants were often inextricably  
led. Many Arabs had had an inkling of the revolt,  
had come into the town with their families, in order  
> out of the way, but others had stayed, unbelieving  
scaring, or, in many cases, actually sympathetic. It  
d be idle to pretend that on that day no innocent  
ns were killed. The circumstances of the case, the  
ary limits of human judgment and control, absolutely  
d the possibility.

will give, as an example of what may well have happened  
ther occasions, one case recounted to me by an officer  
e 82nd regiment. His company was one of those sent  
le relief of the eastern front, and as he and his men  
> their way through the oasis they were continually  
upon by unseen enemies. At a bend of the road they  
ed a group of Arabs in baracans. Some had rifles,  
opened a scattered fire. The Italians fired back and

several of the Arabs dropped. On arriving at the dead bodies, the officer found that one of them was that of a woman.<sup>1</sup> Is there any reasonable human being who can blame the officer or his men for the death of that woman, or of any others who may have been killed in like circumstances ? Several women were killed (I have heard of half a dozen, and probably there were more), some by mistake, some because they were actually taking an active part in the fighting ; the demands of self-defence made it necessary that these should be treated as combatants, not as women. The case already recounted, of the twelve-year-old boy who attacked the Bersaglieri officer, may explain how some 'children' were found among the dead, in addition to those who were killed by mistake, in the confusion of bush-fighting.

These are cases of error, or of sheer necessity. I come now to cases of excess, where soldiers lost their heads, and failed to distinguish, where they might have distinguished, between innocent and guilty. For a reason which will be explained later, these cases must have been limited in number ; and it can be shown conclusively that the Italian soldiers had received provocation enough to cause a loss of control, provocation which has caused other soldiers, of other nations, to see red. Putting aside all natural anger at the treachery of the Arab revolt, at the perfidy which turned against them those to whom they had showed kindness, with whom they had shared their food ; putting aside the desperate feeling that comes from a desperate

<sup>1</sup> Both men and women wear the baracan—a reputed descendant of the Roman toga—with one fold draped over the head. At a distance of twenty-five yards it is difficult for a newcomer to distinguish the sexes ; at a hundred yards any one might be deceived. One correspondent has asserted that the dress of the women is totally different from that of the men. This is true of nomad Beduins and Jews, but not of the Arabs who inhabit the Tripoli oasis.



A GROUP OF ARABS, SHOWING DRESS.

There are both men and women in the group.



JEWISH WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF AMRUSS



situation ; one fact stands out naked and horrible in all that it connotes : ‘they had seen their dead.’

The phrase is Mr. Kipling’s, put in Mulvaney’s mouth, and readers of *Soldiers Three* will remember how the Black Tyrone went into action mad with rage because on the morning of the fight they had seen their dead—the poor, mutilated dead whom the fortunes of a previous fight had left in the hands of the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Readers of Mr. Kipling will remember, too, the well-known lines :—

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains,  
And the *women* come out to cut up what remains,  
Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains  
And go to your God like a soldier.

By the night of October 23 it was known only too well what had happened to some of the wounded and dead who had fallen into the hands of the Arabs. An English correspondent has committed himself to the statement that the Arabs did mutilate corpses, but only after the massacres (*sic*). In the first place such a statement shows a blank ignorance of the A B C of Arab warfare. One may go farther, and say of Mussulman warfare. On the Indian frontier, in the Sudan and elsewhere, times without number, the same unprintable obscenities have been perpetrated upon the bodies of our dead. There are some who will never forget the field of Baker’s El Teb, where many hundreds of corpses bore mute witness to the savage and insulting ferocity of the Arab warrior and his women. And the few European witnesses of atrocities perpetrated by Turks, under the new régime as well as the old, will

<sup>1</sup> Mulvaney’s words are worth quoting : ‘Seeing that ut was the first time the Tyrone had ever seen their dead, I do not wonder they were on the sharp. ’Tis a shameful sight ! When I first saw ut I wud niver ha’ given quarter to any man north of the Khaibar—no, nor women either, for the women used to come out after dark—Augghr ! ’

hesitate to suggest that the Arabs were left to themselves when they exercised their ingenuity upon the dead and living Italians who fell into their hands.

The statement of the correspondent in question not only shows a general ignorance of what happens in war against Moslems, but a complete disregard of irrefutable evidence which was available to him as well as to other people, if he had chosen to try and see both sides of the question. Definite evidence of the discovery of mutilated bodies on the night of the 23rd and morning of the 24th has been put on record by Colonel Fara (now Major-General Fara), Captain Sereno, and other officers of the 11th Bersaglieri. Some of the few surviving soldiers of the 4th and 5th companies report hideous scenes of cruelty and mutilation, outrages committed upon the dead and wounded when the fight was still raging, before there was any question of repression, when it was still doubtful whether the Italian left was going to be completely overwhelmed. One soldier, who escaped death by hiding in a well, declares that he saw his wounded comrades fall victims to the fury of Arab women, who dashed out their brains with large stones, stripped the dead bodies and proceeded to mutilate them. On the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th, and at different times throughout the next six weeks, mutilated bodies were found in various parts of the oasis, but for purposes of evidence I have thought it well to limit myself to those cases which from their date cannot be considered, even by the most prejudiced critics, as being acts of revenge for Italian cruelty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A special interest attaches to the fact that the earliest report of the fight of October 23 which reached Scutari (Albania) from Turkish sources, stated that the Turks had crucified fifty Christians. The news gave great satisfaction to the local Mohammedans, who taunted their Christian neighbours with this fresh proof of Turkish power. The report said nothing of Italian atrocities.

In the circumstances, is it surprising or extraordinary, is it really a matter for clamour, on the part of a friendly nation, that individual Italian soldiers should have lost control and been guilty of cruelty, or of undiscriminating slaughter? Such acts are ugly, and worse; they give just cause for keen regret; they may be fairly quoted as an argument against war; but they may not with justice be used as the ground of an indictment against an army and a nation, unless it can be conclusively shown that they were committed wholesale by a soldiery which gave itself up to massacre, whether deliberately or with an insensate desire to kill. Charges of wholesale massacre have been definitely laid at the door of the Italian army, yet these charges have not been supported by reasoned evidence, and seem, in fact, capable of disproof.

Unfortunately, an examination of this question necessitates a rough survey of the evidence against the Italian army, and I find myself compelled to a strong criticism of the methods of judgment adopted by certain correspondents<sup>1</sup> and other writers in the press. Their descriptions of the general situation, and the nature of some of the charges brought, seem so little supported by any evidence I have been able to gather on the spot that a very unpleasant impression is left.

Obviously, the first step in any inquiry would be the attempt to arrive at a reasoned estimate of the number of Tripolitan Arabs killed during the revolt and the four subsequent days. The accusers of Italy have not hesitated to commit themselves to a figure: '4000 men, of whom not 100 were guilty, and 100 women and children.' It is all

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the correspondents with the greatest experience and reputation, while criticising such excesses as did take place, held strictly aloof from participation in the charges brought by some of their colleagues.

cut and dried : a little over three thousand nine hundred innocent men were wantonly put to death (the entire trouble in the oasis being caused by less than a hundred ubiquitous Arabs), while the fury of the Italian soldiery, not content with the deliberate slaughter of this vast number of men, was wreaked upon helpless women and children ! No evidence whatever has been given for those remarkable figures, except of the type that may be characterised as bazaar rumour. Photographs have been adduced as corroborative proof of the story told, but photographs, naturally, do not show us the whole four thousand one hundred, and the figures are really important. Immediately upon my arrival in Tripoli I began to make inquiries as to the number of local Arabs who had been killed during the revolt and its suppression. The Italian accounts all agreed roughly, the numbers given varying from four hundred to four hundred and fifty. The figure is not insignificant, but it puts a different complexion upon affairs from that suggested by a computation ten times as great. I received the same answer from so many independent sources that I was convinced of the substantial accuracy of the figure ; but it seemed necessary, if sceptical opinion were to be influenced, to try and get at the impression made upon intelligent local Arabs, and find out if they had any definite idea of the number of their people killed.<sup>1</sup>

The first Arab I spoke to on the subject was a small proprietor from Sharashat. I met him by chance ; he was

<sup>1</sup> In this search I was greatly helped by Mr. W. F. Riley, Lloyd's agent in Tripoli, who has lived there for twenty-five years. His knowledge of the Arabs of the oasis (especially those of Sharashat, where he had a summer house), and the confidence felt in him by the Arab community, made it easy for me to secure expressions of opinion which I might otherwise have been unable to reach.

not prepared for my questions ; and we talked first about other things ; about his house and garden at Sharashat, sadly damaged by the tide of war ; and about the complete cessation of trade with the interior. After some conversation I sounded him : ‘ I suppose very many of your friends and neighbours were killed, after the revolt ? ’

He looked surprised a little, and answered : ‘ No, very few.’

‘ How was that ? ’ I asked. ‘ I thought many were killed.’

‘ No ; for the Italians took them and brought them into the town.’

His version of affairs was corroborated by others, but for a considerable time I could get no definite figures. It seemed necessary for my purpose to go slowly, and above all, not to approach the Arabs through the Italian authorities or any one too closely connected with them. I had been in Tripoli for nearly two months when I made the acquaintance of an Arab ‘ notable,’ who was able to give more precise information. This man, while favourable to the Italian occupation, felt very sore about the repressive measures taken in the oasis, and expressed himself forcibly on the subject. His point of view was that though there had undoubtedly been a rising, it had been the work of desert Arabs, and that in the repression many innocent people (his own people) had been put to death. How many local Arabs did he think had been killed ?

‘ Oh, many. Some hundreds. Four hundred, or perhaps five.’

But his reply, though it agreed with the Italian accounts, and served as corroborative evidence, was still too vague. I pursued inquiries, and eventually got into communication with the Arab notable who had been entrusted with

the duty of collecting the bodies for burial. Here at last definite figures were available. He had identified and buried two hundred and seventy-three Arabs of the oasis, but he knew of about a hundred and fifty more who had been killed, and either buried by others or left still unburied, though collected ready for burial, when the Italians drew in their lines on October 28. He calculated that, in all, between four hundred and four hundred and fifty had lost their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence seems fairly complete, and it does not tally with the figures that were blazoned abroad in the anti-Italian campaign. One would like to think that two additional 0's had crept into the printed reports, making four thousand instead of four hundred and one hundred instead of ten. But these figures would scarcely have sustained the charge of a wholesale massacre, and this happy solution of the problem must be rejected. The correct figures surely show the truth of what I have already suggested : that the cases of deliberate or frantic excess cannot have been very many. If we reckon together those who were undoubtedly guilty, those who, while conceivably innocent, had compromised themselves by carrying arms or resisting search, and those who were shot by mistake, either in the battle of the 23rd or on the subsequent days, there is obviously a comparatively small margin left for victims of 'massacre.'

The charge of wholesale massacre would seem to be sufficiently rebutted by the evidence already detailed ; but it is desirable to examine shortly a few of the statements made in support of the accusation. Nearly all the

<sup>1</sup> Many other Arabs were killed during the four days, October 23-27, but the figures that matter are those which refer to the 'oasis' Arabs. It will hardly be suggested that the Italians did wrong in defending themselves against attack from outside.

correspondence directed against the behaviour of the Italian troops would have rejoiced the heart of a cross-examiner, but a selection of four typical instances should go some way towards proving the point I wish to make ; that witnesses who give such evidence, where such issues are involved, must be regarded with profound distrust.

The first piece of 'evidence' to which exception may be taken is that which furnishes as proof of wholesale massacre the fact that a large number of dead bodies were piled together in a heap, and proceeds to generalise as follows : that as similar executions took place all over the oasis, we may readily deduce the total sum of massacre. The suggestion that large numbers of people were huddled together and shot *en masse* is undeniably shocking. That suggestion has been made, and it is an unwarrantable deduction from a perfectly simple fact. The heaps of dead, so graphically described, were to be seen in two places, at least, in the oasis. There was one mass of one hundred and seven bodies, another of seventy.<sup>1</sup> But they were not the sign of executions *en masse*, in the manner suggested. According to my information, which I have no reason at all to doubt, these heaps of dead were formed of bodies which had been collected for burial—a fact which puts another complexion upon affairs. There were two or three spots in the oasis which were used for carrying out formal executions. Men were brought there to be shot, and bodies were brought there from other places to be buried. It will be admitted that the false deduction gives a picture that is altogether at variance with the truth, and upon that false deduction, and others, the most fantastic erections were founded.

<sup>1</sup> This information comes from the Arab notable already mentioned, who buried the dead.

But a worse *suggestio falsi* is contained in the following sentence : ‘ I saw scores of women and children brought into the house,<sup>1</sup> but I never saw one of them leave again. I can only imagine what happened to them.’ In view of the fact that the Italian troops collected the women and children in houses and kept them under guard till they could be safely sent into the town, these sentences constitute a gross abuse of journalistic decency.

What value can be attached to correspondence which reports the murder of women and a ghastly heap of butchered Arabs at Suk-el-Juma, the Friday Market (see map—Mercato del Venerdi) ? Suk-el-Juma lies about a mile beyond the lines occupied by the Italians in October, far outside the zone of their activities. The heaps of dead reported to have been found there were perhaps victims of cholera ; unless the following story furnishes a better explanation.

The majority of the dwellers in the Jewish village of Amruss (a few minutes from Suk-el-Juma) had migrated to Tripoli after the Italian occupation. But many families, especially the more well-to-do, had remained in their homes, unwilling to sever themselves from the property which they could not convey to the town. They buried their most precious possessions, and trusted to a show of poverty to protect their lives. Their expectations were disappointed. The Turks and Arabs descended upon the village and demanded the money and trinkets which they knew existed. Where the answer was unsatisfactory they slew, regarding neither age nor sex.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A deserted house in the oasis, in which the correspondent quoted had taken refuge.

<sup>2</sup> I give this story for what it is worth. It was told by some of the few inhabitants who were found at Amruss, when the Italian victory at Ain-Zara had cleared the oasis of Arabs. The correspondent who reported the discovery of murdered women at Suk-el-Juma insisted that the dissimilarity of dress made it impossible that they should have been



JEWS OF AMRUSS



JEW AND JEWESS OF AMRUSS



One more instance of inaccurate correspondence may be quoted. In describing a ride through the oasis on October 27, a correspondent, who had only that morning returned from a vain effort to land at Benghazi, drew a pathetic picture of the desolate homes that lined the road to the west of the Cavalry Barracks. No one reading the passage in its context could draw any inference save one : that all the inhabitants had been massacred. The correspondent in fact committed himself to the statement that of the innocent inhabitants of the oasis 'nearly all the men, and even the boys above a certain age, were shot.' No hint was given of the truth, that the vast majority of the dwellers in the oasis had fled, or had been removed, to the city during the three previous days. And no one could have guessed that the locality described had been the scene of hard fighting the day before. Yet it was near this point, on October 26, that the Arabs broke the Italian lines and penetrated into the oasis. It was along this road and through these very gardens, that three companies of the 82nd regiment, and a dismounted squadron of the Lodi cavalry, had to fight their way to the support of the hard-pressed 84th. It is not surprising that a number of dead bodies were seen ; and for some people the mere sight of dead Arabs on a battlefield would have been enough to induce a shriek of 'massacre.'

There are many other similar cases of bias and distortion, but these seem sufficient to indicate the type of imposition which was practised, consciously or unconsciously,

killed by mistake for men. It is interesting to note that while the Arab men and women, who wear the baracan, are almost indistinguishable at a short distance, there is complete dissimilarity in the case of the Jews.

Much has been made of the fact that bodies found in the oasis were bound hand and foot. The Tripolitans treat all corpses in this way before burial. It is practically the first thing done when life is extinct.

upon the British public. And a similar imposition was practised by means of photography. Two photographs were published which obtained a wide circulation. One represented a soldier standing near an Arab woman who was seated on the ground ; underneath was the extraordinary legend : ‘Dying woman on the ground. The soldier is wondering whether it is worth while to finish her off with a shot from his rifle.’ (This photograph was republished later with a less scandalous inscription.) The second photograph represents a group of women and children being escorted through the oasis into the town. In the foreground there is one dead body. The photograph is perfectly harmless. The women were being brought into the town in the manner already described, and it was inevitable that they should pass some corpses on the way. But the label attached is an offence against common honesty : ‘Arab women and children brought in from the oasis over the dead bodies of their own kinsfolk.’ It is not surprising that the same purveyor of information should have sent home as a view of Sharashat a photograph taken on the outskirts of Tripoli town. Sharashat was the place of the moment, and this would seem to have been sufficient justification for attaching a false label.

It is perfectly clear that in correspondence such as I have cited the regard for accuracy and ordinary justice has played a lamentably small part. When facts are twisted to present a meaning which they do not really bear ; when provocation and mitigating circumstances are deliberately ignored ; when hasty generalisations are founded upon false deductions from insufficient evidence ; when a whole army and a whole nation are slandered by such methods, the net result is a heavy blow, not at the good name of Italy’s army, but at the reputation of British journalism.

These are hard words, but they do not admit of qualification ; and it seems increasingly desirable that a protest should be made against the extent to which modern war-correspondence tends to disregard the canons of a reasonable judgment and the claims of elementary accuracy, in order that it may tickle the public palate with a sufficiently sensational story. It has recently happened again, after a year's interval, that European opinion has been seriously misled by the inventions and exaggerations of war-correspondents. For this reason, the moment is not inopportune to insist upon the injustice done to Italy by the campaign of calumny directed against her soldiers.

## CHAPTER V

## THE SECOND PHASE : THE FIGHTING ROUND TRIPOLI

WITH the clearing of the oasis and the drawing in of the Italian lines, hostilities in Tripoli entered definitely upon a new phase.

During the first three weeks of the occupation it had been calculated that Italy could count upon the acquiescence, if not the active support, of the Arab population in the Tripoli neighbourhood. Preparations seem to have been made, and the general outlook was certainly based, upon this assumption. One fact alone is sufficient evidence : that though Mausers brought by the *Derna* were known to have been distributed widely in Tripoli, the work of disarmament was not prosecuted with vigour or system until it was too late. Italian policy, during those first three weeks, seems to have been characterised by a certain laxity and over-confidence, grounded upon the supposition that the Turkish cause would find no real support among the Arabs of the littoral.

The inevitable reaction followed. An attitude marked by an excess of trustfulness was transformed into a mood of undue suspicion ; the confidence of the early days was replaced by a persistent caution which would hear of no risks. The first fruits of the crisis of October 23 were the severe reprisals in the oasis and the withdrawal of the troops on the eastern front : the aftermath was found in

a suspicion and a bitterness which hindered the necessary *rapprochement* between Italian and Arab, and in an exaggerated diffidence which seriously hampered military action.

The abandonment of the advanced line on the eastern front, which included the Agricultural College, Fort Messri, El Hanni, and Fort Hamidieh, gave rise to hostile comment at the time. The moral effect of such a move was bound to be considerable, and though the Italian lines were not too strongly held, they had in fact proved strong enough to repel two fierce attacks, one of them sustained in circumstances of great difficulty. By the clearing of the oasis a special cause for preoccupation had been removed, and fresh troops were daily expected. On the other hand, the fact stood out that the lines had been broken twice, and that they were too extended for the available number of troops. And a graver danger threatened: cholera had broken out on the eastern front. The epidemic had started in the Sokra district, before the Italian occupation, and in due time it attacked the soldiers. Obviously, the possible spread of the disease had to be reckoned with in the calculations of the authorities; they had to provide a wider margin of reserve troops than the original lines permitted. In any case, ordinary prudence demanded the evacuation of positions already deeply infected. The material loss caused by the move was negligible. Forts Hamidieh and Messri were dismantled and useless, and their abandonment meant nothing. It is true that the Turks gained El Hanni, which had been called the key to Tripoli: correctly enough in one sense, for its occupation by the Turks seemed a necessary prelude to successful action against the city. So long as El Hanni remained Italian, the door could not be unlocked. But when the Italians

evacuated the position, the key proved useless. The plateau of El Hanni was of no practical value to the Turks, because of their weakness in artillery, and because it was commanded from the sea. The only visible result of the retirement was the arrival of a few Turkish shells, which might have done some damage, but in fact fell harmlessly, one in the *Konak*, two or three in the town, several in the harbour.

The moral effect of the move was more serious. To withdraw from a position after hard fighting must give rise to unfavourable interpretations, and there is no doubt that the move was regarded as a confession of weakness, both in Tripolitania and in Europe. Europe saw Tripoli 'besieged,' actually shelled by the Turks, and the occasion furnished a plentiful crop of the false reports which Turkish invention delights in providing. It seems to have been actually believed in many quarters that Tripoli was on the point of being retaken. The visit of the United States cruiser *Chester*, with orders to embark the American Consul and any American subjects,<sup>1</sup> is sufficient proof of the success attained by the purveyors of false news. But the effect upon the civilised world could only be temporary; of greater significance was the effect upon the Arabs. The retirement dealt the first blow at Italian prestige, and gave the Turks a chance of securing the adherence of many wavering Arabs. Regarded from this point of view, the withdrawal was unfortunate; yet the motives which counselled prudence were essentially sound, and, on the whole, the balance of evidence goes to show that the lesser of two evils was chosen.

<sup>1</sup> The American Consul, Mr. John Q. Wood, declined to leave Tripoli, and the incident was of service in exposing the unreliability of certain news-factories.

The blow which was dealt to Italian hopes by the Arab revolt and the attack of October 26 had only a hardening effect on the attitude of the Government. On November 5 the Turkish provinces were solemnly annexed to Italy, and by that date strong reinforcements had already been despatched to Tripoli. Two battalions of Grenadiers which arrived at the end of October were brigaded with the Bersaglieri and quartered at Feschlum. The 93rd regiment arrived on November 1, and was followed two days later by the 18th. These two regiments, forming the 5th Brigade, were quartered at once on the extreme left of the Italian position, and on November 6 the 93rd, advancing from the Tombs of the Karamanli along the shore road, disposed of the enemy without any difficulty and reoccupied Fort Hamidieh. The rest of the line made no advance, and it was not until three weeks later that the old positions were retaken, just a month after they had been abandoned.

During all that month, Tripoli did, in a sense, suggest a beleaguered town. But only in a sense; for the enemy were concentrated upon a single flank, the western and southern fronts being practically undisturbed; and it was evident that when the Italian authorities chose to make a move, they could free the Tripoli district from the presence of the enemy. General Caneva was determined to go softly, to wait until he had at his disposal a sufficient number of troops to hold the city and the trenches with absolute security, and to move in overwhelming force against the main body of the enemy. The 6th Brigade, the 23rd and 52nd regiments, arrived close on the heels of the 5th, and was followed by the 50th regiment and two battalions of the 37th. By the fourth week in November General Caneva could dispose of thirty-four battalions of

infantry (twenty-five thousand rifles),<sup>1</sup> seven batteries of field artillery, and nine batteries of mountain guns.

Meanwhile the troops on the eastern front were leading an uneasy life. Every day and every night, at any hour, they were the object of attacks which were never pushed home, and were the more irritating for that reason. And sniping was practically continuous, all through the daylight hours. There was one attack in force, on November 10, in which the Turks and Arabs had a tentative 'go' at various points in the line of trenches, but chiefly on the difficult eastern front, where perfect cover was obtainable, and where the Italian artillery could not be used with much effect. The attack was easily repulsed, and no real further attempt was made to test the Italian defence. The frequent little rushes were probably the work of newly-arrived Arabs, who had been enticed by glowing Turkish promises and were anxious to try a round with the infidel, to see whether they could not win a way to the loot of Tripoli. Small reconnaissances were made from time to time by the Italians, and in the oasis these always meant a brush with the enemy—a sharp exchange of shots, no more. Cavalry patrols were sent into the desert, but both these and the detachments of infantry in the oasis were given strict orders not to engage closely, however tempting an opportunity might offer. From these orders, perhaps, there may have arisen the accounts of Italian nervousness, or even pusillanimity, which have been sent through Europe by various correspondents in the Turkish camp who got their news second-hand—accounts of patrols sent flying by a

<sup>1</sup> The battalions in Tripoli have never been up to war strength, the double companies containing from one hundred and fifty to two hundred men instead of two hundred and fifty. This fact may account for exaggerations in estimating the Italian numbers, which have been put at least twenty-five per cent. too high by most writers.



*Photo Captain Mola*

A RECONNAISSANCE



*Photo Captain Mola*

ON THE EDGE OF THE OASIS—A RECONNAISSANCE



few shots from a knot of Arabs, or of half a battalion sent back to the trenches by a similar handful of riflemen. To the extent that such stories were true, and not merely the flamboyant invention of the Oriental mind, they are readily explained by the fact that reconnoitring parties were under orders to withdraw as soon as they got in touch with the enemy. Perhaps caution may have been carried too far ; perhaps the morale of the Italians suffered a little, while the morale of their adversaries was correspondingly raised, by the strict adherence to the wishes of the commanding general. That is an arguable point. On the other hand, it was essential to curb undue rashness, and it is obvious that the Italians would have played into the enemy's hands if scattered detachments of infantry had allowed themselves to be engaged in the oasis, or if cavalry patrols had been enticed into a fight among the sand dunes.

In the oasis firing went on practically all day, and in fits and starts through the night. The Arabs peppered the trenches, and when the Italians grew impatient they peppered the palms in answer, making it too hot for the lurking snipers, who hid behind wells, or in houses, until the firing lulled, and they could resume their game. Many established themselves in palms, and from these coigns of vantage blazed away for hours, with very little result. Bullets whistled everywhere, but the Arab of Tripoli is a very wild shot, and the dangerous zone lay well behind the trenches. It was interesting to note how the Italians gradually became hardened to the sniping. A newly arrived regiment wasted a prodigious amount of ammunition, but a short time in the trenches sufficed to steady the men, and enabled them to distinguish between an attack which had to be repelled, and a worrying fire which

had to be ignored, or replied to by picked shots, with orders to fire only when they could locate an enemy.

During the early part of November the outbreak of cholera threatened to become more than serious. As many as four hundred soldiers were down at one time, and on one day, at the height of the epidemic, there were over one hundred deaths among the troops. In all, nearly one thousand soldiers lost their lives.<sup>1</sup> And for a short time the native population was heavily stricken. The desperate condition of want and misery which was the normal lot of the lower stratum of the Arab population made it a ready prey to disease. Men, women and children died in the streets, or under the arches where they slept at night. But the Italian authorities gripped the problem with admirable energy and promptitude, and in a short space of time the epidemic was arrested and stamped out. The task was obviously very difficult: a crowded Oriental city with a doubtful water-supply, teeming with a surplus population which was camping out in the streets and markets, presented special obstacles to the successful tackling of the problem. These obstacles were quickly surmounted, and the highest praise is due to those who were responsible for a victory gained under thoroughly unfavourable conditions.

Further difficulties were caused to the authorities, and much discomfort to the troops, by an inundation which followed upon the unusually torrential rains. On November 17 the dry bed of the Wady Mejnин, which runs from the Tarhuna range to the west of Ain Zara, filled and overflowed. Lakes formed in the desert and remained all through the winter, while the main torrents burst through

<sup>1</sup> The number of deaths has not been officially stated as yet, but Cav. Tullio Irace's book, *With the Italians in Tripoli*, which appears to have a semi-official sanction, puts the total at one thousand. The other figures quoted were given me by the medical authorities.

*Photo Comerio, Milan*

TRIPOLI—November 17th, 1911





the trenches at Bu Meliana, drowning one soldier, seriously damaging the waterworks, and pouring down the Bu Meliana road till the streets of Tripoli were a foot deep in swift-running water. Houses and shops were flooded, provisions and other merchandise were ruined, while one pretentious modern building had its porch swept away, and its walls cracked from top to bottom. Most of the harm done was either unimportant or else easily reparable, but the partial destruction of the Bu Meliana pumping station, and of the water-pipes leading to the town, was a serious impediment to those who had to provide for the health of Tripoli. The damage took some time to repair, and in the meantime the extreme scarcity of good water added a further preoccupation to the minds of both military and sanitary authorities.

During all this month there was a feeling of tension in the town. The revulsion of sentiment on the part of the Italians was naturally very strong. For a time there was a widespread feeling that Arab and traitor were nearly synonymous terms, and it must be admitted that suspicion on the part of the authorities was well enough grounded. Though the city was now under the strictest military law, there were many ugly or disquieting incidents : sometimes a sentinel was missing or found dead at his post, and on most nights stray shots were fired from the housetops at the groups of *Carabinieri* and soldiers who patrolled the streets. No Arabs were allowed abroad after 8 P.M., but it was difficult to enforce this rule literally, as very many of the natives brought in from the oasis had no place to sleep in but the streets outside the walls, under the low arcades that line the Shara Azizia or the narrow street that lies between it and the sea. In these and other specified places the Arabs were allowed to spend the night, and the

patrols showed wonderful patience in dealing with obstinate natives who indicated their preference for other camping-grounds.

For the Arabs of the town as well as for the Italians it was a time of difficulty and strain. They were bewildered and afraid. They feared the anger of the Italians, but at the back of their minds they feared still more the anger of the Turks and the savagery of the desert tribesmen ; and they felt that these old and well-known scourges were threatening them again. Every day they heard the rattle of musketry on the eastern front. When the Turkish shells dropped into the town, the natives were much more disquieted than the invaders. There were only a very few of these messages, but they were pregnant with meaning. They prevented the Arab of Tripoli, who seems to be apathetic rather than fanatical, from accommodating himself readily to the new order of things. They made him nervous and apprehensive, uncertain where his interests lay, afraid to commit himself. As the Italians settled down, and put themselves to the work of consolidating and developing their base, work and riches came to the lower-class Arabs, inducing a natural tendency to accept with thankfulness this strange new dispensation. But uneasiness and diffidence prevailed, until the Italian advance removed a lurking and insistent fear, or hope—in whatever form the vague emotion clothed itself.

Two important actions, with a week's interval between them, rolled back the rumour of war from the outskirts of Tripoli. A cloud of uneasiness lifted, and the illusion of peace settled heavily upon the town.

On November 26 the Italians attacked and took Fort Messri, advancing from the west ; and the troops on the eastern front advanced slowly all along the line, driving the

enemy through the oasis, until they reoccupied the positions abandoned a month previously. The secret of the movement had been very well kept, and the only correspondents present at the earlier stages of the fight were three who had slept in the trenches overnight. The *Carlo Alberto* began firing at 6 A.M. and for an hour searched the oasis to the east of El Hanni. At the same hour the troops detailed to attack Fort Messri issued from the trenches at Djemal Bey's house, and advanced eastward along the Italian front. The column was prepared for all emergencies, and consisted of three regiments of infantry, the 23rd and 52nd (6th Brigade) and 50th, two batteries field artillery, two batteries mountain guns, and two squadrons of cavalry. The whole of the 1st division (ten battalions) was held in readiness against the chance of a general action developing in the desert.

The attacking force proceeded eastward to Fort Messri, with the 50th regiment, which had only arrived in Tripoli two days before, thrown out on the right to guard the flank against attack from the desert. By 9.45 Fort Messri was taken, and a little before this hour the 50th got in touch with a considerable body of Turkish regulars, who had advanced from the direction of Ain Zara. The colonel of the 50th had received orders to halt his men in a specified position, and to act strictly on the defensive. When he came into touch with the Turks in the open, he sent back a galloper to the headquarters staff at the Cavalry Barracks, asking permission to attack. The answer came back that he was only to do so if he could guarantee that there was no risk. This damping condition shut down his effort at initiative; the 50th dug themselves rifle-pits and remained in their position all day till four o'clock, extended in open order, keeping up a desultory fire, and suffering occasional

casualties from the fire of the Turks. They lost over fifty killed and wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the arrival of the 6th Brigade at Fort Messri was the signal for a general advance all along the eastern line. The Bersaglieri and the Grenadiers advanced from Hamura and Feschlum, with a battalion of the 37th and the Fenestrelle battalion of Alpini in reserve, while the 93rd, with the 18th in support, advanced by the shore road and from Shara Zauiet. Owing to a misunderstanding on the part of the *Carabinieri*, who patrolled all the roads to the trenches, correspondents were prevented from reaching the front during the first hours of the fighting. The order had been given that no townspeople, even if they had ordinary passes, were to be allowed to enter the oasis, and the *Carabinieri* took the order to apply to all civilians. The correction was not made until nearly midday, and remarkable stories began to filter into the town. Three correspondents had succeeded in getting to the front by dodging the *Carabinieri* and going across country, and one of them, *not* an Italian, galloped in with a remarkable story: how 'the Bersaglieri, with fixed bayonets, were ploughing their way through a solid mass of seven thousand Arabs and Sudanese.' In point of fact, the advance was proceeding slowly, but steadily, and was proving, in the words of the official report, 'relatively easy.' No risks were being taken; the enemy were being systematically swept up; and though there were checks at various points, where parties of Arabs took refuge in a house, to make a last desperate stand, the old lines, with the exception of the El Hanni plateau, were occupied by three o'clock.

Meanwhile the 52nd had come in contact with the Bersa-

<sup>1</sup> Towards four o'clock an ambulance train was sent out to bring in the wounded of the 50th. It was immediately made the target for a heavy fire from the Turks.

glieri, and were swinging in upon El Hanni from the right. The position rapidly became untenable, and the enemy were finally driven helter-skelter from the plateau. They did not await the last bayonet-rush of the Bersaglieri and the Grenadiers, but slipped down the gentle slope on the far side of the plateau, and were lost in the oasis. Small groups rallied there, and kept up a desultory fire for a time, while the Bersaglieri established themselves in their old quarters, with the Alpini on their right and the Grenadiers on their left. New trenches were quickly dug, while the old ones were deepened and repaired. All the troops were in the highest spirits, while the Bersaglieri in particular were full of rejoicing over the reoccupation of El Hanni. They had been very unhappy over the abandonment of their old position, and now they felt they had squared matters. They had advanced coolly and carefully through the treacherous labyrinth of the oasis, climbing walls, pushing through hedges, threading their way by narrow paths ; stopping to dislodge a group of Arabs from a house or well, or, harder still, waiting under fire for others to do this work, so that the order of the advancing line should be kept. But the sight of El Hanni, the open sandy plateau shining through the trees, sent them forward at the double, in a charge which the enemy did well to avoid.

The behaviour of the Italian troops during the advance was worthy of the reputation they had been winning for themselves during the previous weeks, in the fights of October 23 and 26, and the anxious days and nights in the trenches. They showed both discipline and dash, and they were admirably handled. Officers and men alike were justly proud of the good work done, and they looked forward with eagerness and confidence to the next move.

A few days were spent in strengthening the positions on

the eastern front, in barricading roads, building trenches, and loop-holing walls. But the work of securing the lines was interrupted and saddened by ghastly discoveries, by the finding of those who had been missing after the fight of October 23. Three bodies were discovered first, in a garden a little to the north-west of El Hanni, three crucified and mutilated bodies. Near them lay the unburied corpse of an Arab boy, and he too had been crucified. The cross had been removed, no doubt to do duty again elsewhere, but his pierced hands and feet told their own story. Perhaps he had been taken as a servant by a Bersaglieri officer, been faithful to his salt, and paid the penalty.

On the evening of the same day, November 27, about fifty more bodies were discovered, indescribably mutilated, and some of them bearing obvious traces of torture. Early on the morning of November 28, I visited an Arab house and garden, which had been used as a *posto di medicazione* (advance field hospital) by the 2nd battalion of the 11th Bersaglieri, up to and during the fight of October 23. In the house there were five bodies, in the garden nine, and in a hollow at the back of the house, beside a well, there was a ghastly heap of twenty-seven bodies. It was stated at the time, officially, that practically all the men found at this place were either members of the *Corpo Sanitario*, or else wounded soldiers. A disinfecting dish was found in the house with blood and disinfectant dried at the bottom of it. No object would be served by detailing the record of human savagery displayed by those dreadful remains, the crucifixion, torture, and mutilation that had been practised upon living and dead. One case will suffice as an illustration, the case of a body which was identified by means of a pouch as that of a stretcher-bearer attached to the 6th company of the Bersaglieri. His feet were crossed

and his arms extended : he had clearly been crucified. There were holes in his feet, but his hands had been chopped off. His eyeballs appeared to have been threaded laterally by thick, rough palm-twine, and his eyelids were stitched in such a way as to keep his eyes open. In addition he had been shamefully mutilated. This and other evidences of fiendish torture came as a surprise even to men who had known that the killing of prisoners and wounded and the mutilation of all dead bodies are commonplaces of Moslem warfare.<sup>1</sup>

A week of preparation passed quickly. During those days there was a constant rattle of rifle-fire on the eastern front, and the Turkish batteries pitched shrapnel, spasmodically, at El Hanni, Fort Messri, and the Agricultural College, with no result. The soldiers had already learned to laugh at Turkish shrapnel, and paid little attention to the scream of a shell. But the rifle-fire was very persistent, and rather more accurate than it had been. There were several specially hot corners in the oasis, and the curious spectator had reason to bless those cheerful diggers who anxiously besought him to take shelter. It was comfortable enough in the trenches ; the difficulty was to select the right moment to start for home.

During this week heavy siege guns were landed—6-inch guns and 8-inch mortars. These were placed at Sidi Messri and Bu Meliana, commanding all the desert to the south, and made their debut on the morning of December 4,

<sup>1</sup> Any further description of what I saw that morning would simply be an offence. I have only written as much as I have in the belief that it is well for a non-Italian eyewitness to place on record something of his own experiences, in view of the remarkable defences which have been put forward on behalf of the innocent Arab and the chivalrous Turk. In this connection I would note that one body was treated in a manner which is more familiar to those who have seen Turkish handiwork in Armenia and Bulgaria than to those whose experience has been confined to Arab practices.

when the long-expected advance upon the Turkish headquarters at Ain Zara took place. The Italian plan was framed with the idea of outflanking and enveloping the enemy from the right, while a weaker centre column advanced straight upon Ain Zara, and the left wing fought a containing action in the oasis. The Italian right-hand column, which had the most important work to do, consisted of two brigades under General Pecori-Giraldi : the *Brigata Mista*, consisting of three battalions of Bersaglieri, the 2nd battalion Grenadiers, and the Fenestrelle Alpine battalion, commanded by Major-General Lequio ; and Major-General Giardina's infantry brigade, consisting of two battalions of the 6th and two of the 40th. Attached to this column were four batteries of mountain guns, and two squadrons of the Lodi regiment, sole representatives of the cavalry arm in Tripoli. The centre column consisted of four battalions of Major-General Rainaldi's brigade, two of the 82nd and two of the 84th, with one battery of mountain guns. On the left at the edge of the oasis the serious work was entrusted to two battalions of the 52nd under Colonel Amari, while the 93rd were to make a demonstration towards Amruss, in the heart of the oasis.<sup>1</sup> In all, about twelve thousand men took part in the advance proper, while another three thousand were engaged in the oasis.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the advance was supported by four batteries of field artillery, and the newly-landed siege guns, which thundered destruction from the trenches.

The result of the fight could never for a moment have been in doubt ; the only question at issue was what nature the discomfiture of the enemy would take. News had been brought in that the Turks had entrenched themselves strongly, and it was believed that reluctance to abandon

<sup>1</sup> In point of fact the 93rd scarcely came in touch with the enemy.

the Ain Zara position would induce them to await a decisive action. Much was expected of General Pecori's turning movement, and hopes ran high that the Turks would be cornered and smashed.

The first move took place at dawn, with the advance of General Pecori's division. The column left the trenches near Djemal Bey's house and spread out to the sand dunes that lay to the right, beyond the Wady Mejnин. An hour later (at 7.15), General Rainaldi's brigade debouched from the Messri road, and the Italian guns began the battle. Rainaldi's brigade advanced in a direct line upon Ain Zara, and soon came under fire. The Italian batteries pounded the Turkish positions, and high-explosive shells from the big guns dotted the desert with columns of smoke and sand that looked like miniature eruptions. But the Turkish gunners stuck tenaciously to their work. They fired slowly, but persistently, concentrating their efforts upon Rainaldi's brigade, which advanced with the utmost steadiness and precision of movement. It had difficult ground to cover, for the inundations had filled all the hollows with water, and in one place a veritable lake barred the way. The brigade divided, skirted the lake and pressed up the rising ground beyond, and came to a halt. Watching from a knoll behind, it was difficult to see a reason for the sudden check. The undulating ground afforded plenty of cover, and they were not yet at grips with the enemy. A sweep of the glasses to the right showed the reason. General Pecori's column had come in touch with the enemy among the dunes, and for the time being had got hung up. For the success of the movement it was necessary to halt the centre until the right wing could overcome the opposition and continue its course. The advance was checked while General Pecori proceeded to shell his opponents out

of their positions. In a few minutes the air was full of little bursting clouds, that hung low above the sand-hills, and then blew away. The infantry lay down and waited ; the guns poured shrapnel on to the enemy, and at intervals the big guns from the trenches roared deafeningly. The mountain guns, under Colonel Besozzi, were making beautiful practice, but the right wing was still being held up. The short day was half over, and the turning movement was far from being as well advanced as it ought to have been. A feeling of impatience and anxiety spread through the troops. The men were eager to be on the move, and the officers realised what the delay might involve.

Meanwhile, the 52nd had advanced from the trenches to attack the mosque of Bu-Said, which was situated near the edge of the oasis. Their attack was supported by artillery-fire, and unfortunately, owing to a miscalculation, the advancing troops came under the fire of their own guns. One company was badly knocked about, and the attack was checked until word could be conveyed to the trenches at Fort Messri. Advancing again to the attack, the 52nd had a stiff fight, and were unable (or rather were forbidden) to push forward farther through the oasis. Their objective was really attained by detaching and containing, during the whole of the day, the enemy's force in the oasis, and thus preventing a flank attack on the centre column. The error of judgment which led to the advancing troops being shelled by their own guns is not a matter of great importance, though it was excluded from the official accounts. These misfortunes happen in all warfare, and it is well to realise that they do happen.

As early as midday one could see groups of Arabs leaving the oasis and making for Ain Zara. Ain Zara itself lies in a hollow, behind a low ridge, and on the far side of this



MOUNTAIN GUNS IN ACTION



THE TRENCHES, FROM FORT MESSRI, SHOWING THE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE



ridge nothing could be seen. But retreat suggested itself as the obvious course for the Turk, and Pecori's division was moving very cautiously on the right. Though the whole line was in movement again by one o'clock, there was a long way still to go, and the enemy had gained some precious hours. The Turkish guns fired desperately, and a stubborn rearguard action was fought by groups of Arabs, who contested every undulation of the ground. But the Italian line swept forward irresistibly, and by 3.30 the right-hand column was swinging in upon Ain Zara from the south-west, while Rainaldi's brigade was brushing aside the last remnant of resistance, and breasting the ridges that lie on the north-western side. As the troops reached the high ground, they looked across the wide depression of Ain Zara, and saw the enemy streaming southward in a disorderly mass. Camp, guns, ammunition, clothing, provisions—a great quantity of booty was left behind. But the main body of the enemy, above all, the Turkish nucleus, had got clear away. It looked as though the turning movement had been made too soon in point of place, too late in point of time. Though the Italian troops had done all that was asked of them, and had gained an important victory, the fruits of that victory were not what they might have been.

It would be very unfair to minimise the undoubtedly importance of the results attained. At the same time, to say that the outcome of the battle satisfied expectations would be equally unjust. Italian military opinion, both in Tripoli and Italy, recognises fully that at Ain Zara an opportunity was missed. Various criticisms have been made upon the conduct of the battle. It may be that the kernel of the matter is to be found in the suggestion that the plan of the attack detailed a local objective rather

than the true objective—the enemy's force. If the objective of the day's work was simply the occupation of Ain Zara, and the consequent automatic clearing of the oasis, then the work was admirably carried out and at a very small cost. But such a plan would indicate too short-sighted a view. If, on the other hand, the objective was the Turkish regular force, the benefits of the victory were only incidental, and the day really ended in failure. It may be that the plan of action, relying on the reputation of the Turk in a trench, considered that the two objectives were resolved into one ; that the enemy would not surrender Ain Zara without a struggle, which would give the opportunity for a decisive blow. But two impressions were left on my mind after the battle : that General Pecori allowed himself to be held up when it was all-important that he should press on ; and that his column made its circling movement too soon, turning in upon Ain Zara itself instead of pressing on to the enemy's line of retreat. It was certainly a surprise for Rainaldi's brigade to find itself joined by the Bersaglieri at the approaches to Ain Zara. It was in this way that the Turks were able to get clear—I say ‘Turks’ advisedly, for it would be all but impossible to surround Tripoli Arabs.

In examining the operations, full value must be given to the extreme mobility of the Turco-Arab forces in Tripoli. To some extent the situation is reminiscent of South Africa—slow moving masses of infantry being pitted against a fleet-footed enemy of Parthian inclinations. Certain critics have animadverted severely upon the fact that at the battle of Ain Zara the Italians made no attempt to hamper the Turkish retreat by cavalry attacks. Unfortunately for those critics (but still more unfortunately for the Italians) there was no cavalry to send. Two squadrons, reduced

to less than two hundred men, could hardly have been sent into the sandhills after the retreating enemy. The lack of cavalry was, of course, a serious misfortune, and it certainly seemed as though the presence of two or three cavalry regiments, well-handled, would have meant the capture or destruction of the Turkish nucleus instead of its rout. There was a report that the authorities in Rome had been anxious to send out more cavalry, but that General Caneva had refused the offer. The mind jumped back a dozen years, to a famous telegram: 'Unmounted men preferred.'

## CHAPTER VI

## THE THIRD PHASE : PREPARATION ?

WITH the occupation of Ain Zara the oasis cleared automatically ; Tripoli was freed from the near presence of an enemy, and from the immediate reminder of war. The oasis was no longer an insidious peril, but a wonderful succession of gardens and glades, where fruit hung overripe, and flowers bloomed, and tall grasses waved. And the desert, for the space of a dozen miles, became no more a mystery, but an undulating steppe of authentic soil—not sand, save for the intersecting belts of dunes—clothed with a strange beauty of colour and air and light. When the year turned, the bare curves put on a light garment of greenery, of weeds and wild-flowers, yellow and blue and purple.

The desert fascinated, but the mountains called insistently, Jebel Tarhuna and Jebel Gharian, hard and blue against the southern horizon. The mountains called, and all Tripoli went into calculations as to the date when the call would be answered. Every one was confident of the next move, but it was fully realised that preparations for an advance would take time (though some asked why preparations had not already been made). It was felt that the occupation of Ain Zara had definitely closed one phase of the war, and that though it seemed to mark the first step in another phase, the second step could not be taken for several weeks, at the earliest. The end of January was, perhaps, the popular fancy for the date on which the



TURKISH GUNS CAPTURED AT AIN ZARA



THE CAPTURED GUNS BEING BROUGHT INTO TRIPOLI



desert expedition would start, though some put it a fortnight earlier, and others, the cautious prophets, as much as a month later. It was realised fully that the transport question would prove a hard nut to crack, but every confidence was felt that the difficulties could be overcome. Some pinned their faith on camels, some on motors, some on a railway, some on a mode of advance that would employ all three. These, before long, felt their prognostications justified ; for camels arrived from Tunis and motors from Italy, while news soon came that railway material had been ordered and was on the way.

In the town a change of mood was immediately noticeable. The suspense was at an end ; the population seemed to have made up its mind that for good or ill the Italians were in Tripoli to stay. With the object of impressing the victory of Ain Zara upon the natives (though the silence after weeks of firing was proof enough) the seven guns captured from the Turks were brought in with pomp and parade, decked out with palm branches. In front of the *Konak* the artillery horses were unharnessed, and the guns were run up the steep paved entrance-way by sturdy grinning soldiers. The streets were packed with natives. Arab women shrilled their weird ululations, black men shouted exuberantly, and the thin-voiced Jews were specially vociferous. The Arab men watched silently, critically ; but it seemed that they saw in those lumbering guns a sign that the Turkish domination had passed away. A number of rifles were given up, or their hiding-places indicated, and their possessors seemed thankful to be rid of them. Waves of anxiety and uneasiness came over the people from time to time, when wild rumours filtered in from the desert, but the whole aspect of the town was subtly changed.

For a fortnight after the occupation of Ain Zara reconnaissances were the order of the day. The oasis was searched from end to end, and on December 13 Tajura was occupied without resistance, except for a few stray shots. Meanwhile there were daily reconnaissances from Ain Zara, where General Pecori's division was busily engaged in constructing a huge entrenched camp. The desert to the south of Ain Zara, within a radius of eight or ten miles, was searched by flying columns, who came into occasional touch with patrols or small bodies of the enemy. But it seemed clear that the main Turkish nucleus had retired to Azizia, and the aviators confirmed this supposition.

On December 17 a strong column, consisting of four battalions, two batteries, and a regiment of lancers (which had arrived a week after Ain Zara) was sent westward to Zanzur, with the object of exploring the country and destroying the telegraph station. The small Turkish garrison retired in anticipation of their arrival, and only a few shots were fired at the lancers who first entered the oasis. Those sheikhs who had remained in Zanzur (the bulk of the inhabitants had removed inland) made submission to the column, and were brought into Tripoli that evening to do formal homage to the Italian power. The natural sequel to this step was reported by spies<sup>1</sup> a couple of days later. The Turkish garrison had returned; inquired into the absence of the sheikhs and refused to accept the explanation that they had been made prisoners. A deadly logic informed the Turkish argument: the Italian column had not met with resistance; therefore the sheikhs were not prisoners, but had gone to Tripoli to make submission.

<sup>1</sup> The source of this story perhaps makes it suspect. Yet it fits entirely with the probabilities.



FINDING BURIED RIFLES IN THE OASIS



HOISTING THE FLAG AT TAJURA



Such treachery could not be tolerated, so their families were duly executed.

The results of taking submission without giving protection could scarcely have been more swiftly or forcibly illustrated, and it is clear that this untoward incident must have helped to rivet wavering Arabs to the Turkish cause. Although there is excuse for a failure to gauge the measure of Turkish ruthlessness, yet the reprisal might have been foreseen, and, on broad principles, the whole episode of the reconnaissance to Zanzur must be regarded as an error. To occupy Zanzur was a necessary preliminary to any important military action. A mere raid, followed by withdrawal, was of doubtful value at the best ; in view of the accompanying circumstances and the inevitable sequel, the step cannot escape condemnation. These Zanzur sheikhs were the first, outside the occupied towns, to make submission to the Italians. The precedent set by their experience was not favourable to the prospect of further defections from the Turkish cause.

Mid-December was an unlucky period for Italy. The day before the Zanzur reconnaissance a sudden storm laid low the hangars which were to house the newly-arrived airships, P 2 and P 3. One hangar was practically completed, the other half-finished. Both were levelled to the ground and damaged beyond the possibility of repair. The airships were to have ascended before Christmas, but it was not until ten weeks later that they made their first flight in Libya. This was a serious disappointment. The absence of maps, and the general lack of acquaintance with the country, were a grave handicap to the Italians, and the airships had been destined to make up for these deficiencies.

Two unfortunate occurrences were followed by a third

which nearly attained the rank of 'a regrettable incident' —to use a consecrated phrase. On December 18 five Arabs arrived at Ain Zara from Bir Tobras, a small oasis about eight miles to the south-east. They reported that a body of two or three hundred Arabs had collected at Bir Tobras, and were ill-treating the families of the inhabitants, who appealed for protection. General Pecori resolved to take the opportunity and sent out Colonel Fara of the 11th Bersaglieri, with two battalions of his own regiment, the 2nd battalion Grenadiers, two mountain guns, and a squadron of the Lodi cavalry, to make a reconnaissance in force, sweep up the hostile Arabs at Bir Tobras and bring in the inhabitants. Three of the five Arabs who had brought the news were sent as guides, and two were detained as hostages at Ain Zara. Apparently Colonel Fara's orders were very precise. He was to attack at six o'clock, with the earliest light, and in order to ensure a punctual arrival he was sent off at 2 A.M., through the rolling sandy ground that lies south of Ain Zara. It is uncertain whether the guides played false, or whether they lost their way in the dark, groping through that featureless country. In any case, dawn found Colonel Fara's column a long way from its objective. The guides picked up the track, but the column did not reach Bir Tobras till nearly ten o'clock. Colonel Fara attacked with all speed, and drove the small bodies of the enemy into the little oasis. Following up the attack, he found himself in touch with a much larger number of the enemy than had been reported, and sent back word that he was engaged with a considerable force, but could deal with it. This news does not seem to have reached Ain Zara till after three o'clock. Before long the Arabs were reinforced by a body of Turkish regulars, and on taking stock of his position Fara realised the impru-

dence of further offensive action. The short day was half done ; he was a long way from Ain Zara, in time if not in distance, and his column had only been equipped for a day's reconnaissance. Food was lacking, and, a much more serious matter, ammunition was running short. Moreover his machine-guns had been rendered useless by sand, which had jammed their mechanism. At midday he started to retrace his steps, and make for home, sending an aide-de-camp to Ain Zara to report his movements.

The rearward movement was the signal for immediate attack upon the part of the enemy, and in a short time the retreating column found itself heavily attacked from three sides. As they got among the sand dunes, the men floundered badly, and the retreat became very difficult—so difficult that Colonel Fara resolved to entrench himself and send to Ain Zara for reinforcements. Picking out an advantageous position, he halted, formed a square, and prepared for a long wait. The enemy attacked vigorously, and got very near the Italian square, but they were always repulsed. A good many of the Arabs had little stomach for the fight, in spite of the exhortations of a number of marabouts, and the more direct methods of persuasion adopted by Turks who were scattered among them as officers.<sup>1</sup> It was fortunate for the Italians that this was so. If the Arabs had really been determined it might have gone hard with Colonel Fara's column. For ammunition was running very low indeed. A fierce attack was made at five o'clock, and then there was a lull. Another attack was made at eight o'clock, and another at eleven, but the Arabs seem to dislike fighting in the dark, and these two

<sup>1</sup> A Bersaglieri officer told me he saw uniformed Turks cuffing and kicking Arabs who were reluctant to make a rush.

attacks were readily repulsed. The night dragged on, and no news came from Ain Zara. Colonel Fara held a council of war, and it was decided to attempt a retreat under cover of darkness. An attack at dawn seemed inevitable, and there was little ammunition left. No news had come from Ain Zara, and it was at least possible that Colonel Fara's messengers had been cut off. An attack in the morning, if no reinforcements came, meant that the Italian troops might be shot down at leisure, unable to reply to the enemy's fire. At three o'clock on the morning of the 20th the column got silently under way, and succeeded in retiring without raising an alarm. They stumbled off northward among the dunes, and at dawn came in touch with the rest of General Lequio's brigade, which had started out the night before, but had lost itself completely in the dark, and, hearing no firing to the southward, had resolved to wait for the day. The united brigade, returning to Ain Zara, met General Pecori with the rest of his division, setting out to see what had happened.

The Bir Tobras affair gave rise to a great deal of discussion, and was responsible for the return of General Pecori to Italy, early in January. The reason first given for his supersession was that of ill-health, and it is true that General Pecori, besides suffering from deafness, was not really fit enough for a colonial campaign. But reasons of fitness have not, generally speaking, weighed very heavily with the Italian authorities, and it was well understood that the Bir Tobras incident, following, it may be, upon the failure to clinch matters at Ain Zara, was the cause of General Pecori's departure from Tripoli. His own indiscretion, or that of his friends, in publishing a memorandum in defence of his conduct, together with General Frugoni's censures and the rest of the official correspondence on the

subject, took away all doubt as to the facts, and caused his removal from the active list.

General Frugoni seems to have condemned the whole operation. In the first place, he objected to the despatch of Fara's column unknown to himself, and pointed out that he might have required the co-operation of General Pecori's division in a larger movement; that in any case no important step should have been undertaken without his knowledge and consent. In the second place, he found fault with the composition of the column, considering it too weak for the purpose, and indicating, among other points of complaint, that it ought to have been given an entire battery (six guns) instead of a section (two). In the third place, he condemned the attempt at a night march in the desert, and reminded General Pecori that in planning the attack on Ain Zara he had declined to consider an advance from the trenches before dawn; his opinion, therefore, on the subject of night-marches was well known, and ought to have been respected. He proceeded, further, to find fault with the fact that apparently no provision had been made for keeping in touch with Fara's column, and that when news of the engagement reached Ain Zara, no steps were taken to get into communication with it, or to have troops ready in case of emergency.

General Pecori's reply acknowledged a want of prudence, but he defended himself against certain charges. He pointed out that this reconnaissance was similar in type and extent to others which he had been carrying out almost daily since the occupation of Ain Zara. He claimed further, that the column was more than strong enough for any opposition he had reason to expect, and that if he had been misled as to the situation and strength of the enemy,

the fault really lay with the intelligence department, on whose information he had relied. He maintained that Colonel Fara ought to have kept in touch with him, as he had a detachment of cavalry for the purpose, and found fault with him for having attacked Bir Tobras after losing his way and arriving late on the scene. The object of the movement had been the surprise, at dawn, of the small body of Arabs reported, and with the failure to accomplish this end Colonel Fara ought to have returned to Ain Zara, or, if he took the responsibility of going on, ought to have sent back word at once to say what he was doing. General Pecori explained why, when Fara's first message arrived, he did not take steps to reinforce him ; first, because he thought that the column could take care of itself, and second, because a relieving column would have had to march in the dark, and probably imitate Fara by losing its way in the sandhills. He defended the delay in despatching the rest of General Lequio's brigade (it did not leave Ain Zara for more than two hours after the receipt of Fara's appeal for reinforcements) by saying that the preparation of supplies, etc., necessarily took some time, especially in the darkness.

General Frugoni was unable to accept the explanation and defence offered, and General Caneva concurred in recommending General Pecori's supersession.

The Bir Tobras story has been given in some detail because the event and its sequel are illustrative of interesting points in the story of the campaign. The action itself does not call for very much comment. By an unlucky combination of circumstances Colonel Fara's column found itself in a tight place, and while most of the troops behaved with gallantry and coolness, something like a panic occurred among some of the men. The officers, who have never

failed at a pinch, rallied and steadied the wavering troops, and Colonel Fara's own example of courage and confidence may be said to have saved the situation. He had already earned the admiration and thanks of his country by the way he had handled his regiment in earlier actions. His men had learned to believe in him implicitly, but it is scarcely too much to say that after the Bir Tobras action, their enthusiasm for their leader had in it something of veneration. Colonel (now Major-General) Fara had little to do for a long time after his promotion to the command of a brigade, and it is rumoured that an inclination to rashness and a failure to see difficulties in the way made him suspect to his superiors. However that may be, General Fara possesses two of the first requisites in a military leader—the gift of inspiring his followers, and the will to fight.

If it is necessary to apportion the blame for what nearly turned out to be a disaster, General Fara may be held to have been gravely at fault in not informing General Pecori of his failure to keep to the prearranged time-table, and of his resolve to carry through the programme notwithstanding. But it can hardly be said that things would have turned out very differently if he had done so. When General Pecori did receive news, he made no move, and he seems to have satisfied himself that the situation of the column need not give him any anxiety. The extraordinary feature—the feature surely most subject to criticism—of the whole episode is the fact that no preparations had been made at Ain Zara for reinforcing the reconnoitring column. If Fara had sent back at any time of the day asking for immediate help, none could have been sent to him for at least an hour, as no reinforcements were organised. Even when General Pecori, late in the day, received news

that Fara was engaged with a large number of the enemy and had begun to retreat, he took no steps to be ready for an emergency, so that when the request for reinforcements arrived, all preparations were still to make. General Pecori seems to have launched Fara's column into the desert, and then ceased to have troubled himself about it any further. Yet at the same time he seems to have denied to Fara the right of initiative.

On the other hand, the strength of the column would scarcely appear to give grave cause for censure. Fara had about two thousand men and two mountain guns, and these numbers were surely ample for the purposes designed, and for any situation that was likely to develop. The critical position in which the column found itself was not due to its numerical weakness (an outside estimate of the Turco-Arab forces would be three thousand<sup>1</sup>), but to a shortage of ammunition, to the difficulties of the treacherous ground, and to the lack of proper communication with and support from the base at Ain Zara. If Colonel Fara's force was considered as a self-contained unit, fit to tackle any emergencies without help, it was of course too weak. As a flying column, reconnoitring over a radius of not more than eight miles from the headquarters of the division to which it belonged, it can hardly be considered inadequate.

The most interesting points revealed by the affair are the obvious determination of the supreme command to avoid all the ordinary risks of war, and, with that end in view, its conception of the proportionate military strength requisite for given operations. General Pecori argued

<sup>1</sup> The Italian estimate is three thousand. Accounts from the Turkish side claim that the entire force in action against the Italians consisted of five hundred Arabs and a handful of Turkish regulars. In view of the consistent inaccuracy of Turkish accounts, it is difficult to accept this figure, but the Italian estimate was probably exaggerated.

*Photo W. F. Riley*

INSIDE THE ITALIAN LINES AT AIN ZARA





that the operation he had planned was in no sense unduly risky ; that its success would certainly have brought him commendation ; and that the plight to which the column was reduced was due partly to the imprudence of his subordinate, and partly to sheer bad luck. Such a plea could hardly be entertained, and the interest of its rejection lies less in the fact than in the reasons which seem to have animated Generals Caneva and Frugoni. The plan itself, and the strength of the column detailed for its execution, were condemned with fully as much emphasis as any remissness of conduct on the part of the officers responsible for carrying it out. The condemnation of the Bir Tobras reconnaissance was the first indication of a policy which afterwards revealed itself more clearly, and was indeed openly avowed : a policy which put out of court any action involving the minimum of risk or more than the minimum of loss, and, with the object of ensuring the postulate laid down, required that no operation should be undertaken without the assurance of a strong numerical superiority over the forces of the enemy. The adoption of such principles of action gives ground for surprise ; the enunciation of the second certainly seems to call for criticism.

After the fight at Bir Tobras reconnaissances were continued regularly, but as simple reconnaissances. The exploring columns were kept in close touch with their base by means of supporting troops, and the cavalry patrols received the strictest orders to act only as scouts. Thus on January 9 four columns carried out a reconnaissance from Ain Zara towards the four positions Bir El Turki, Bir Tobras, Fonduk Ben Gashir and Bu Selim. The two central columns sighted considerable bodies of the enemy, but no attempt was made to engage. Other reconnais-

sances placed the enemy along the line that runs from Bir Tobras to Suani Beni Adem, and it was reported that a strong Turkish contingent had moved forward from Azizia to this latter oasis—the Garden of the Sons of Adam. After the battle of Ain Zara the Turks had retired upon Azizia, and, in anticipation of an early advance, had moved the bulk of their reserve stores from there to Gharian ; but as the conviction grew that the Italians did not intend at once to follow them into the desert, they moved forward again to Suani Beni Adem, which is only fifteen miles from Tripoli ; close enough to threaten the surroundings of the town and dominate the neighbouring tribesmen, far enough away to admit of an easy retreat to the Jebel, if that course should seem politic.

Meanwhile Tripoli had become a scene of bustling activity. The days already seemed long past when the news from the trenches was all that mattered ; a new life stirred and flowed. The tide of commerce that the war had brought rose higher, and there were added the beginnings of activities that would persist after peace came—the work for the port, long talked of by the Turks and always relegated to a more convenient season, and the roots of other enterprises that should flourish in the future. But the railway was the chief object of interest, and there was a good deal of discussion as to the delay in getting on with a work upon which so much seemed to depend. At first, it appears, there was talk of a Décauville line, and when this idea was given up, opinion in Tripoli inclined to the belief that the expected advance would be made *pari passu* with the construction of the railway. News came that sixty kilometres of rails were on their way from Italy, and this figure seemed to promise an advanced base at Azizia. The line if route was marked out through the oasis as far as Sido

Messri, and by the middle of January soldiers were busy making the road-bed for a metre-gauge line.

The delay had been puzzling. It was difficult to avoid the conclusion that all the material for railway construction should have been ready beforehand, so that the battle of Ain Zara might have been followed immediately by the energetic pushing forward of preparations for the advance. Perhaps the explanation may be found in the belief that the discomfiture of the Turks at Ain Zara would lead to the conclusion of peace. But the battle of December 4, as it was fought, did not deal the blow that had been anticipated, and calculations based on the expectation of a more fruitful victory were unhappily falsified. Yet even after the battle steps were not taken immediately to push on all possible work. Rumours of peace persisted, and became specially definite towards the end of December. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the delay arose from that tendency to wait upon events which must be held to have marked the Italian conduct of hostilities for at least six months.

Still, if progress was slow it must be admitted that there were obstacles in the way. The port of Tripoli is practically an open roadstead, only slightly sheltered by the reef of rocks that runs far out on its western side. The water deepens very gradually, and landing railway material, with the inadequate facilities existing, was a matter of great difficulty. Wooden jetties were constructed, but the ordinary supplies for the army of occupation had first call on the resources of the port, and the weather was such that the minds of the authorities were often sorely exercised over the question of landing their stores. The wind blew persistently during December and January. Short spells of calm came now and then, and admitted of a spurt in the

way of landing stores and material, but frequently ships had to wait for many days before discharging their cargo. In the circumstances it is not surprising that the question of constructing a sheltered port impressed itself quickly as Tripoli's most pressing problem. Commendatore Luiggi, a well-known engineer, was sent from Italy to study the question and draw out plans, and in a very short time the main outlines of a scheme were settled. Building stone was found at Gargaresh, and the first step towards the construction of the port had to be the laying of a narrow-gauge line to Gargaresh from the mole, to bring in material for the main breakwater.

Hitherto interest had lain to the south and east of Tripoli. The names which had become most familiar—El Hanni, Amruss, Tajura, Ain Zara, Bir Tobras, Fonduk Ben Gashir—all were marked in the south-eastern segment of the half-circle that formed the field of operations. Save for the one expedition to Zanzur, the Italian troops had made no movement on the western side, and the enemy had shown no signs of activity in that direction. Zanzur seemed empty and lifeless, and Italy had only to stretch a hand to grasp it. Gargaresh was practically in Tripoli, under the very walls of the town, almost within the lines. Correspondents used to write of the 'avamposti' at Gargaresh, though in point of fact the oasis of that name lay a long two miles beyond Fort B., the westernmost point of the Italian position. Still, Gargaresh practically counted as part of Tripoli. Natives came and went with garden produce, and no disturbance had ever threatened.

But the centre of gravity was swinging westward. For the Turks it was essential that their communications with Tunis should be kept open, and it seemed deducible that the real theatre of war, so far as the Turkish army was



GARGA'RESH  
Photograph taken from an airship



concerned, would be the western half of Tripolitania proper, including the chain of hills from Gharian to the Tunis border. The establishment of their headquarters at Azizia not only put them astride the main caravan to the Jebel, it placed them in the Urshefana country, in the midst of the strongest of the coast tribes, and from this centre their influence radiated over all the field strategically necessary to them.

The first small indication of the fact that the direction of outlook must be changed was found in a sudden raid upon the inhabitants of Gargaresh. On January 4 a band of desert Arabs swooped upon the oasis, and carried off all the supplies they could lay hands on. The performance was repeated with added emphasis on the following day, and the wretched villagers, reduced from misery to sheer destitution, fled lamenting to the Italian lines. Some men had been killed by the raiders, others wounded ; and women had been carried off. A few days later a strong column searched the oasis and reconnoitred the desert for some distance beyond, without finding any traces of the enemy. But the raids hastened the occupation of Gargaresh, which the requirements of the port had already marked for an early date.

A column was sent out on the morning of January 18, a stronger column than would have been considered necessary three weeks earlier, before the reports of the enemy's concentration at Suani Beni Adem had been confirmed, and the world of Tripoli had been startled by the news of depredations committed upon peaceful Arabs living almost under the walls of the town. The column consisted of the 52nd regiment (three battalions), the 1st battalion of Grenadiers, a battery of mountain guns and two field guns, and two squadrons of the Guides Cavalry—in all about three thousand

men. There was a certain amount of critical discussion as to the excessive strength of the force despatched to cover the work of fortifying the position ; but events proved that the dispositions of the authorities were based upon more trustworthy information than that which was available for their critics. In any case, when prudence cost nothing, and troops were in actual need of exercise and change, it was hardly fair to condemn the employment of many where few might have been sufficient.

The advancing column, commanded by Colonel Amari of the 52nd, reached the edge of the oasis about 9 A.M. and were received with a sharp fire from the palms ; but after a brisk exchange of shots the Arabs occupying the oasis (perhaps a hundred in number) were driven out to the west, and the work of fortifying the position was begun. The Grenadiers were thrown forward about a mile to the west of the oasis, while the 52nd were posted directly to the south. Sniping continued for a time, but the greater part of the enemy retreated southwards towards Fonduk El Tokar, and a uniformed patrol, which had been visible on the rising ground to the left of Fort B. disappeared in the same direction. The work progressed apace, and most of the spectators rode home to lunch, thinking that the interest was over for the day.

But shortly after midday a force of about two thousand<sup>1</sup> Turks and Arabs appeared from the south, moving with great rapidity. They advanced with the utmost boldness, and a number of cavalry endeavoured to turn the right flank of the Italian protecting line, and to cut in between them and the sea. To prevent this manœuvre the Grenadiers were swung round till their right rested on the shore, while all the troops fell back a little on the oasis and the forts,

<sup>1</sup> An account from the Turkish side says three thousand.

and the Italian guns fired rapidly and accurately upon the advancing line. The Turks and Arabs advanced in extended order with the utmost resolution, and before three o'clock they were engaging the whole Italian line very closely. A number of them got within a hundred yards of the Italian position, and the Grenadiers were obliged to fall back in order to keep in touch with the 52nd and protect the guns, leaving their rough trenches to be occupied by the foremost Arabs.

The fighting was very hot for about an hour, but the Italian fire was accurate, and the Arab fire, as usual, much too high. Towards four o'clock the enemy began to retreat slowly and sullenly, and shortly afterwards Major-General Fara (late Colonel of the 11th Bersaglieri) was sent out from Tripoli to take command. By sunset the Turks and Arabs were in full retreat and the Italians were left in undisputed occupation of the position they had come to fortify. General Fara disposed his troops for the night, and the men began to dig their trenches preparatory to the arrival of a much-needed meal.

Night fell, and the order came from Tripoli that the troops were to retire within the Italian lines. It was obeyed with the greatest reluctance on the part of the soldiers; the half-dug trenches and the wire entanglements were left, and a disheartened body of men returned to the town, bringing with them a dozen killed and sixty wounded.

That is the plain story of the facts, but all next day the town and the trenches were buzzing with questions. Every one was mystified. The enemy had been soundly drubbed, as was only to be expected. Yet the Italian troops had been ordered to retire without completing the work they had set out to do, and they had not been allowed to encamp

upon the ground they had won and held, a position, moreover, naturally strong, of moral and strategical advantage to its possessors.

The reason for the retirement, which was ordered by General Frugoni, would seem to be, briefly, as follows. News had come in that the attack of the 18th was only a feint to draw the Italians out of the town, perhaps to lead them on to Zanzur, and that an attack in much greater force was designed. It was decided that the occupation of Gargaresh by General Fara's troops would mask the fire of the guns from Forts Sultanieh, B. and C., and that in any case it would be better not to allow them to be out of touch with the supreme command.

Apparently the information was wrong. Probably the Turco-Arab forces had suffered much more severely than they had expected, and did not care to renew the fight. In any case, a reconnaissance by the lancers, carried out on the afternoon of the 19th, found no trace of hostile movement within a wide radius to the west of Tripoli. Many bodies were found, and many arms which had been abandoned in the enemy's retreat ; but of a living foe no vestige or sign. In consequence of this reconnaissance Gargaresh was occupied, on the following day, by a strong force under General De Chaurand, consisting of the 82nd and 84th regiments, one battery field artillery and one battery of mountain guns, six squadrons of cavalry and a battalion of sappers. The cavalry, infantry and artillery took position to the west and south of Gargaresh, and the sappers began the construction of three redoubts connected by trenches, to secure the oasis and the quarries from further molestation, and to dominate the approaches to Zanzur, the westernmost redoubt being placed a kilometre beyond the oasis. The whole force with the exception of the



*Photo W. F. Riley*

STAFF-OFFICERS AT THE BATTLE OF GARGARESH  
January 18th, 1912



*Photo Captain Mola*

GENERAL DE CHAURAND AT GARGARESH  
January 20th, 1912



cavalry, which returned to Tripoli in the evening, remained quartered at Gargaresh.

By this occupation, the moral effect which it was feared would result from the retirement on the evening of the 18th might conceivably have been cancelled ;<sup>1</sup> that is, so far as the Arabs were concerned. But the men who fought on that day were naturally disheartened, and it is hard to believe that the reasons which influenced General Frugoni should have outweighed the clear moral reasons for remaining on the spot. The oasis of Gargaresh is in such close touch with Tripoli that there was no fear of isolation. The troops on the spot were perfectly capable of defending themselves against any possible attack, the more so as they could have been supported by naval guns, which would have enabled the batteries to concentrate their fire upon the terrain to the south of the oasis.

During the day, the despatch of a flying column from Bu Meliana, to take the enemy in the flank, was strongly urged upon General Frugoni, but he would not countenance the move. Such an attack could not have failed, at the worst, to add to the sum of the enemy's discomfiture, and it might have succeeded in destroying half their force. Moreover, it opened up another chance. No doubt the reasons which forbade this flanking movement were identical with those which counselled retirement in the evening. The flanking column might itself have been taken in the flank by the large force of Turks and Arabs reported to the southward. The argument does not appear conclusive, for an anticipation of such attack eliminated its danger. Given the large number of troops at General Frugoni's disposal, and

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Alan Ostler's book, *The Arabs in Tripoli*, shows that this was not the case. Although the Arabs retired at sunset, they considered they had won a notable victory, and the return of the Italians to Tripoli was apparent confirmation of a view which had no other basis in fact.

the overwhelming superiority of his artillery, a general action with the enemy's main body was surely the most desirable end he could propose. If the despatch of a column from Bu Meliana increased the chance of an attack in force, that was so much more reason for the move. The very arguments advanced against it, and against leaving General Fara at Gargaresh, seem to point to a decision diametrically opposed to the line of action adopted.

It is of course possible that the bigger opportunity outlined might have come to nothing. But the chance deserved acceptance; a lesser gain was inevitable, and every successful blow dealt at the enemy counted something in the game. The conclusion forced itself upon the mind that prudence was being overdone, and that a greater measure of self-confidence would be more fruitful of result.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE THIRD PHASE : INACTION

LOOKING back, there is a difficulty in deciding when it became finally evident to the attentive spectator that the months which followed the battle of Ain Zara were not a period of preparation for decisive action ; that, if decisive action in the spring had ever been seriously intended, the idea had subsequently been rejected. At the end of January there still seemed to be good prospect of an advance towards the mountains, though signs were not wanting to cast a shadow of doubt upon the eagerly expected move. The Ain Zara railway progressed very slowly, and its construction was clearly not being prosecuted with the vigour required for an early advance. Moreover, while there was still confident talk of the time when the line would be pushed forward through the low sand dunes that lie to the south of Ain Zara, there were some observers who had recognised that the best route to the Jebel lay not by way of Ain Zara and Fonduk Ben Gashir, but by the Zanzur-Azizia road.

It is interesting, in retrospect, to note how the pros and cons were weighed by those who began to doubt whether, after all, an advance into the desert formed a part of the immediate programme. Against the prospects of an advance there spoke the leisurely progress of the railway, the obvious difficulties of transport, the known caution of General Caneva, and the recognition that chances of

successful engagement had already been refused. On the other hand, the last fact seemed capable of a directly opposite application. It was argued that a refusal to employ troops in operations which could not be decisive pointed clearly to a big move in the near future ; that the troops were deliberately held in leash so that they might be keener and fresher for this move. Other signs pointed in the same direction. Some two thousand camels had been imported from Tunis and Benadir, and it seemed evident that these must have been brought for some other purpose than to improve the breed in Tripolitania, though the animals left in the town of Tripoli were sufficiently weak and undersized to warrant an importation for this reason. Fifty motor wagons, each carrying between twenty and thirty hundredweight, were packed in the 'Suk-el-Tlata, or Tuesday Market, and it was reported that Italian firms were working night and day to treble the number.

On the whole, in spite of discouraging signs, civilian observers calculated on a move early in March, while the army kicked its heels and wondered when it would be allowed to do its duty.

The engagement at Gargaresh, on January 20, was the last bit of real fighting within sight or sound of Tripoli until the battle of Zanzur in June ; but on the morning of January 28, the Turks and Arabs made a demonstration in force in the direction of Ain Zara. It would seem that there had been some idea of attempting a surprise in the early hours of the morning ; but a few Arab rifles went off prematurely, and what appeared to be the main attack developed much too late. The object of this movement, in which it was computed that some three thousand men took part,<sup>1</sup> must be a matter of doubt, as there was no real attempt to press

<sup>1</sup> An account from the Turkish side says 1000.

home any attack, and none of the enemy got within six hundred or seven hundred yards of the Italian lines. A desultory fire was kept up for some time, till at about 9 A.M. the attacking forces withdrew, having inflicted little damage<sup>1</sup> and, in all probability, having suffered only a slight loss. An Italian column was sent out of the entrenched camp, to attempt a counter-offensive, but no very vigorous effort was made to get in touch with the quick-moving enemy, who displayed their usual, and natural, dislike of the Italian artillery. The attack had looked as though it were designed to tempt the Italians to a battle, but the sequel proved otherwise, and the object of the movement remains obscure.

Early in February General Caneva left Tripoli for Rome, and his departure gave rise to a plentiful crop of rumours. Some saw in the visit the prelude to immediate action ; others feared that it betokened the abandonment of the hoped for advance. It is now generally understood that from the moment of landing General Caneva was doubtful as to the wisdom of an early attempt at penetration, and that after the revolt of October 23 he threw the whole weight of his experience and reputation against the desert expedition which report had fixed for the spring. On the other hand, it was known that the directing minds in Rome, though anxious that no risk should be taken, and few lives lost, were pressing for a more vigorous offensive and a consequent early termination of hostilities. General Caneva's visit, therefore, carried important issues. Upon him there lay the onus of proving to the authorities at home, both civil and military, that the programme he favoured was preferable to the more ambitious undertakings which had been generally hoped for at the outset of the war.

<sup>1</sup> The Italian loss was two killed and eight wounded.

If he was unable to satisfy his critics it seemed clear that the course of events would shape itself differently, and that a new commander would be found for the expedition. To entrust a general with the carrying out of a policy in which he did not believe was not a probable mistake.

During General Caneva's absence a distinct hopefulness was noticeable in the Army of Occupation. Without injustice to General Caneva, it may be said that he had not succeeded in inspiring his command with confidence that his policy was the right one, and a natural impatience manifested itself in all ranks. On the other hand, impatience did not spell discontent. While a forward movement was anxiously desired, there was observable everywhere a readiness to accept the view that there were good reasons for delay, that the advance would come all in good time, and that meanwhile soldiers were there to do what they were told, even if that meant doing nothing. Still, there was a feeling that the prestige of Italian arms was not being heightened by the long inaction, and the hope was general that the visit to Rome might somehow result in the adoption of a more forward policy.

Towards the end of February General Caneva returned to Tripoli, and it soon became evident, even if his return were not sufficient proof, that the views of 'the man on the spot' had prevailed. Conviction dawned at last upon every one. When the first railway engine was landed in Tripoli, it was too late to be hailed as the herald of a forward movement. The idea of a desert expedition receded into the background, and speculation was confined to the possibility of other, less ambitious undertakings.

Two obvious moves suggested themselves, both overdue : the occupation of Zanzur, and a landing on the coast at Zuara, or some other point which would serve as a base

for operations directed against the enemy's main line of communication with Tunis.

The occupation of Zanzur seemed a necessary prelude to any forward movement ; and if all attempts at penetration were to be postponed, it seemed the more desirable to establish as firmly as possible that position upon the coast which seemed to be the limit of General Caneva's immediate ambitions. But the period of inaction was to be doubled before another move was made in the neighbourhood of Tripoli.

While Tripoli town slept undisturbed by the rumour of war, the only other Italian garrison in the western province was leading an uneasy existence, still harassed by Turkish fire. The town of Homs is dominated by a hill, the Mergheb, that lies about two miles to the south-west. From this hill a Turkish battery threw occasional shells into the town, and it became evident, rather late in the day, that the position must be taken and held by the Italians. With the object of drawing off as many Arabs as possible from the neighbourhood a pretence of landing was made at Sliten, some thirty miles to the eastward, on February 26. The feint had the desired effect, and large numbers of Arabs concentrated to repel the expected attempt to disembark. In order to keep the enemy on the spot the pretence was continued on the 27th, till a wireless message from Homs reported the occupation of the Mergheb. The Italians had advanced before dawn, in three columns, and had practically rushed the position before the Turks and Arabs could collect for its defence. After a brief struggle the enemy were turned out at the point of the bayonet, and though they were reinforced in the afternoon, and made a determined attempt to regain the hill, they were repulsed with heavy loss.

Six days later, on the night of March 5, a fierce attack was made upon the Mergheb. The Turks and Arabs advanced about 9 p.m. in the light of a full moon, and the fight continued all night. Great bravery was displayed by the attacking forces, who fought their way up to the Italian positions time after time, only to be rolled back with heavy loss. All their efforts were in vain, and no further attempt was made to dislodge the Italians.

These successful actions, which were followed shortly afterwards by the battle of the Two Palms, outside Benghazi, did something to allay the uncomfortable feeling which was spreading in Italy, that if Italian arms were receiving no checks, they were certainly making no headway. The absolute lack of movement in the neighbourhood of Tripoli was generally felt to be detracting from Italian prestige, and the news of successes elsewhere was doubly welcome on that account.

As week after week went past it became increasingly difficult to realise that Tripoli was the base of an invading army whose most advanced posts were well within the range of gun-fire from the sea. In the town itself there was every kind of peaceful activity, and the oasis was gradually being repeopled. Towards the end of December the Arabs who had fled to the desert began to return, and by the middle of January the sheikhs of the Sahel district had sent in a list containing the names of two thousand three hundred Arabs who had returned to take up their occupations again. About the same time those inhabitants of the oasis who had been living in the town since the revolt were allowed to go out to their gardens by day, and work under surveillance, returning at nightfall. A little later the inhabitants of the suburb of Dahra, largely Maltese, were permitted to return to their homes, and the fugitive



*Photo Captain Mola*

ARABS COMING IN FROM THE DESERT TO MAKE SUBMISSION



AMRUSS (from a roof)



Jews of Amruss, the more courageous at least, rejoined those of their fellow-villagers who, for the sake of their property, had remained to brave the chances of war. The inhabitants of Amruss, or rather those who had stayed in their homes, probably suffered more than any other dwellers in the oasis. Their village, as one of the Turkish positions during November, was pounded by Italian shells, and they themselves were terrorised, robbed, and otherwise maltreated by Turkish soldiers and desert Arabs. Even after the oasis had been cleared, they lived in mortal fear of stray raiders, for Amruss lay well outside the Italian line of trenches, and it was not until a *Carabinieri* station had been established at Suk-el-Juma, within two minutes' run, that the Amrussis felt themselves fairly secure.

On the whole, the oasis had suffered remarkably little damage, either from the passage of actual war, or the long presence of an encamped invader. Here and there, in the neighbourhood of El Hanni and Amruss, palms had been levelled by the shell-fire from the *Carlo Alberto*. For a short distance in front of the Italian trenches the ground had been cleared in order to prevent the unseen approach of the enemy. At El Hanni, Amruss, and the Agricultural College, Italian shells had left their mark ; and all through the oasis, but especially at Amruss, Feschlum, and Hamura, the houses were pocked with bullet-marks. Most of the Arabs had removed their poor household goods, and their homes presented a melancholy spectacle, especially where the Berbers and desert tribesmen had plundered. The cumbrous Arab chests remained, except where, as at Shara Zauiet, they had been used as barricades, but for the most part the houses, uninjured save where the shells had fallen, stood stripped and empty, littered with broken rubbish.

No one could have traversed the oasis within the Italian

lines without realising that pains had been taken to minimise the necessary damage of war, and the sum of wanton destruction was commendably small. But the empty villages and deserted gardens, the rotten fruit and the silent wells, told their tale and cast their shadow. When the creak of the well-wheels sounded again ; when dusty groups of Arabs drove their donkeys and camels, laden with garden produce, into the city or the Friday Market ; when houses no longer stared mute and blind, their doorways open and empty, but woke and sounded with their old life, the cloud of war lifted, and let in dreams of a new well-being for this neglected land, so lately moribund.

The events of October 23 and the following days had ceased to dominate the relations between Italian and Arab. Some suspicion and resentment still lingered, and will long linger, in the minds of both peoples, but a certain measure of confidence had begun to be established, that promised well for the future. The Arab notables in Tripoli saw clearly that the Italian occupation would be permanent, and that the Italian authorities were prepared to treat Arab interests fairly. They saw, too, that the occupation meant money—a general prosperity to which Turkish rule had made them strangers. The signs of Italian energy and Italian wealth which were transforming Tripoli were not lost upon them, or upon the populace, which found itself supplied with steady employment at good wages.

While Italian military effort had come to an absolute standstill, while the campaign, as far as Tripoli was concerned, appeared to be marked by a blank inertia, the civil authorities were showing the greatest energy within the limited sphere at their command. By the civil authorities, it should be said, is meant those officers of the staff charged with the civil administration of the town, the municipal



AMRUSS



HAMURA—A VERY HOT CORNER ONCE



commission appointed in February, and, at the back of both, the Government in Rome. The appearance of the town changed marvellously during the first six months of the occupation ; and if much of the bustle and stir was due to the presence of forty thousand soldiers, and the necessity of keeping this force supplied, these months witnessed the beginnings of permanent improvements and developments, which should outlast the war period and prove the foundations of a new prosperity.

The Italians have great faith in the commercial prospects of Tripoli, and it has already been said that the construction of a sheltered port, available for large vessels, was practically their first non-military preoccupation. In the days of Turkish dominion there had been talk of a port—years of talk which had never borne any visible fruit, though, if rumour speaks true, a contract had been prepared before the war, entrusting the long-deferred scheme to a well-known firm of engineers, not Italian. As soon as Tripoli had been relieved of the immediate presence of the Turco-Arab forces, the question of the port was tackled by the Italian authorities. Complete plans were drawn up with all speed, the scheme was passed, and the contract given a few weeks after the beginning of the year. The scheme is ambitious, and the estimated cost of the complete project approaches a million sterling ; but the work will be undertaken in sections, and spread out over a considerable time. The task is greatly facilitated by the existence of the reef which runs north-east from the Spanish Fort, or, as the Italians now call it, the Semaphore Battery. The dimensions of the harbour will be, roughly, seventeen hundred by fifteen hundred metres, and wharfage will be constructed as occasion demands, in accordance with the division of the general scheme into sections. A certain amount of dredging

will have to be done, and it will be necessary to blast some rocks in the middle of the bay, but there will be no difficulty in making a wide area of water accessible to the largest ships. The completed plan of the undertaking is elaborate, including a division of the harbour into naval and commercial ports ; it may be presumed that the carrying out of all the details will largely depend upon the commercial development of Tripoli, but the naval part of the work will probably not be long delayed. Meanwhile, the most necessary part of the undertaking has been put in hand, and hopes are entertained that the early spring will see the completion of a large breakwater and wharf, four hundred metres in length, running out along the reef from the Spanish Fort. A railway line will run direct from this wharf to the main station south-west of the town, and by the middle of March of last year the road-bed was being laid along the narrow, shelving strip of land that lies between the sea and the north-western ramparts of old Tripoli.

The project for the port and the beginnings of a railway system naturally attracted more public attention than the less showy but even more necessary measures of improvement which were quietly got through during the period of waiting. From the first the military administration had set itself to improve the sanitary condition of the town, and the epidemic of cholera in October and November, with lesser onslaughts of typhoid and smallpox, had tested severely the efforts of the authorities, who came out of the ordeal with every credit. A special sanitary committee had been appointed to deal with the cholera epidemic, and this committee had been responsible for the cleaning of the streets and the condition of the town generally. In January these duties were transferred to the municipality.

The municipal services were under the general direction of Major-General Salsa, the civil commandant, but experts were appointed to superintend the working of each branch. A system of inspection of foodstuffs was instituted, and various exposures resulted. Two laboratories were set at work, one chemical, one bacteriological, and these soon rendered useful service. The civil hospital was enlarged and reorganised, and a separate wing was established for the use of Europeans. Dispensaries were opened in various parts of the town, including a special dispensary for ophthalmia, and in all probability these constituted the most immediately useful feature of all the work done. Apart from their direct influence upon the health of the town, they were of the utmost value in establishing confidence between the Italians and the heterogeneous population of Tripoli. At first the attendance was sparse, but the benefits offered were too evident to be overlooked and too great to be refused. By the beginning of March the most frequented of these dispensaries was treating eight hundred patients a day.

In February a municipal commission was appointed, consisting of three members, Hassuna Pasha Karamanli, Cavaliere Frigerio, late sub-prefect of Castellammare, and Captain Castoldi, an ex-officer of the International Gendarmerie in Turkey. Though Major-General Salsa retained his general supervision of civil affairs, the commission of three was charged with all ordinary municipal services, and with the settling of many additional problems which arose from the Italian occupation.

The erection of lighthouses to mark the harbour, the strengthening and reconstruction of the Bu Meliana waterworks, the lighting of the city and of the main roads within the lines, the development of the postal service, and the

establishment of schools, both elementary and commercial, where Italian has been made an obligatory language—these and many other undertakings reflected the energy of the civil authorities. And there was no lack of private enterprise. General Salsa was besieged with applications from all parts of Italy for permits to come to Tripoli and open shops or agencies. The town filled with commercial men of all types, from the small shopkeeper who calculated on making a fortune in six months by selling chocolate and liquor to the soldiers, to the keen-witted representative of a big firm who came to report on the possibilities of trade in the new colony. Many of the smaller men arrived with their stock already ordered, fully committed to the doubtful venture of starting a business in the unsettled conditions which prevailed. Others, and they were the wiser, came to spy out the land. But they brought money into the place, if only to restaurant-keepers and hirers of doubtful sleeping accommodation. The numbers were swelled by the passage of deputies, senators, and members of various investigatory commissions—agricultural and commercial. Nearly all this influx was premature, and much of it was unfortunate. For no real possibility existed of estimating the ordinary conditions of the country, and the competition, in those channels of trade which were open, was so acute that many failures were bound to result, failures which may give rise to unfair prejudice against the new colony. The authorities in Tripoli were strongly opposed to the rush which began to set in, and did all in their power to discourage speculation. Responsibility lay with the home Government, which overrode the local authorities in regard to the granting of permits.

The influx of traders, tourists, and shopkeepers, added to the presence of the troops, resulted in the appearance

of a busy commerce ; money was made and lost ; production was resumed, though on a limited scale ; there was buying and selling and building. Laden ships waited in the harbour for days and weeks, or steamed away without discharging more than a portion of their cargo. Further landing accommodation became urgently necessary, and jetties of a temporary kind were built. The use of rails and sleepers in their construction, rails and sleepers brought for the military railway, was clear token of the situation. By the end of March every peaceful activity was in full sway, within the limited area where such activities were possible ; but the question presented itself insistently : when would that area be extended ? The bounds of *Tripoli Italiana* had not been appreciably widened since the final clearing of the oasis ; not a yard had been gained since the occupation of Gargaresh on January 20. Moreover, there had been no attempt at any military operations further than the usual limited reconnaissances, and only on a single occasion during February and March did any of the invading troops come into real contact with an enemy.

Early in February a battalion of native Askaris and a detachment of camelry, both officered by Italians, had arrived from Eritrea, and the reconnaissance work was shared by these troops and the Italian cavalry. The Askaris are very alert and soldierly-looking men, tall and spare, with a splendid carriage, some straight-featured and copper-coloured, others of the black Sudanese type. They brought a good reputation from Eritrea, and they were to show themselves useful scouts and staunch fighters. Their mobility is remarkable. Running bare-footed in the sand, they are able to operate with cavalry, and their endurance is not less noteworthy than their speed.

On March 3 the Askaris had their first brush with the

Arabs. The battalion left Tripoli early in the morning, and trotted along the southern margin of the oasis until they reached the Tarhuna road. Thence they struck into the desert, south-eastward, to reconnoitre the country to the east of Ain Zara. They came in contact with a strong force of Arabs near Bir El Turki, and, in the words of one of their officers, they stumbled on a wasp's nest. They swung westwards towards Ain Zara, and for five hours they seem to have fought a pretty running fight among the sand dunes, driving the enemy, who had outflanked them, from ridge to ridge. When they came within touch of Ain Zara the Arabs melted into the desert, and the Askaris reached the Italian camp at nightfall, bringing with them ten dead and thirty-eight wounded. Two more men had been killed, belonging to a detached section, and these had been buried where they fell, as nearly all the others in this small party had been wounded. After burying their dead, and depositing their wounded, the battalion set out for Tripoli, and reached their quarters about 10.30 P.M., after a fifteen-hours day, a forty-miles march, and five hours' brisk fighting. They arrived at a run, chanting a war-song ; nor was this fine piece of bravado the last spurt of exhaustion. When the men got to their quarters and fell out, they showed hardly a sign of fatigue. They moved briskly, and their smart, cheerful demeanour had suffered no change. Their officers were very proud of their behaviour, and to the observer it seemed that Italy might well be congratulated on the troops of her Red Sea colony.

On March 10 the huge entrenched camp at Ain Zara was broken up. The division commanded by General Camerana, who had replaced General Pecori, returned to Tripoli and became potentially mobile, while the Ain Zara position was



*Photo Captain Mola*

ASKARIS ON THE MARCH



A REVIEW OF THE ASKARIS



securely held by a strong fort, garrisoned by a regiment<sup>1</sup> and a mountain battery. For three months the Ain Zara division had believed itself to be at the starting-point for the expedition towards the interior. Ain Zara had been regarded as the advance base for the desert column ; and if it had not been so intended, there is little likelihood that a force of ten thousand men would have been established at this particular point. For the effective occupation of the position only a small garrison was needed, and the withdrawal of the division emphasised the fact.

The return of General Camerana's division signified the abandonment of any advance by way of Ain Zara, but for a time the faint hope persisted that the rearrangement of the troops might mean offensive operations in another direction. Rumour spoke again, insistently, of the long-expected occupation of Zuara, and the advance on Zanzur seemed to be imminent. There is no doubt that during the latter days of March a movement of some sort was intended. The climax came early in April, when marching orders were actually issued to a large force, only to be countermanded about twelve hours before the time fixed for starting. The moral effect may be imagined. The officers were in despair, and the troops were left in a state of mingled irritation and bewilderment.

March falsified all expectation, and dragged to its end without a move of any sort. Once or twice a cavalry or Askari patrol played at long bowls with a group of Arabs ; the airships, which made their first ascent on March 4, dropped a few bombs during their reconnaissances ; and the guns from Gargaresh threw occasional shells at distant bodies of the enemy, passing between Zanzur and Suani Beni Adem. But there was no effort to engage on the part

<sup>1</sup> Later the infantry garrison was reduced to one battalion.

of the Italians, and in the long respite granted them the Turks organised and trained their Arab auxiliaries, wisely refraining from any movement of importance against the impregnable lines round Tripoli. A half-hearted attack upon the small garrison occupying the Fort of Santa Barbara at Ain Zara, after the withdrawal of General Camerana's division, was scarcely an exception to the general inaction.<sup>1</sup> The delay to initiate any further offensive movement after the battle of Ain Zara, coupled with the retreat from Bir Tobras, the temporary withdrawal from Gargaresh, and the error committed in not holding Zanzur after going there, resulted in a great augmentation of the number of Arabs in the field. Whereas at the beginning of December the Arab forces in arms against the Italians in Tripoli totalled no more than five or six thousand men, this number had been quadrupled by the end of March.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, while the Turkish nucleus of three thousand men had been weakened to some extent by battle and sickness, its prestige and influence must inevitably have been increased by the inaction of the invaders.

From the beginning of the war the Turks had drummed it into the Arabs that the Italian troops would not dare

<sup>1</sup> A good deal was made of this incident by accounts from the Turkish side. It was reported that the Arabs entered the Italian trenches and drove the Italians back a mile to the northward. In point of fact the Arabs did pass the lines of *unoccupied* trenches which had been evacuated by General Camerana's division, but they made no impression at all on the Italians in the fort. They advanced to within about five hundred yards, making a good deal of noise, but they were quickly repulsed by the Italian sharpshooters and a few rounds of shrapnel. The Italians had no casualties and did not think they had done much damage. An account from the Turkish side gives the Arab loss as ten killed, including a sheikh, and nineteen wounded.

<sup>2</sup> This estimate is based upon figures given me by an Arab notable, who was in a position to know the facts. He argued strongly that a greater initiative on the part of the Italians would have prevented the Arabs, or most of them, from throwing in their lot with the Turks.

to leave the coast and come out to give battle in the desert. The Arabs were doubtful at first, and some Tripoli sheikhs, who joined the Turks at Suani Beni Adem in the early days of the occupation, voiced a frame of mind that was not uncommon. ‘Let the Italians come out and fight us in the open. Then if they win, we shall know that they are the stronger, and fight no more against them.’ The Italians were slow to make any move at all, and the Turks were able to employ the delay to good advantage. The advance upon Ain Zara shook Arab faith a little, but the Turks were quick to point out that the big guns could not be brought farther into the desert, and that the Ain Zara fight was in reality no fair test. Again the Arabs showed some hesitation, but the long inaction which followed, and the retirements from Zanzur and Bir Tobras and Gargaresh, played right into the hands of the Turks.

The situation in Tripoli at the beginning of April presented an extraordinary appearance. The Italian expeditionary force, consisting of thirty-four battalions of infantry, sixteen batteries of field and mountain artillery, and eight squadrons of cavalry, with a battalion of Askaris and a detachment of camelry, lay in the trenches round Tripoli, and at Gargaresh, Ain Zara, and Tajura, growing more and more discontented with the policy which had kept them immobilised for so many weeks. Five miles to the westward of Gargaresh, plainly visible from the farthest Italian redoubt, the Turks had begun to dig trenches on the near side of the Zanzur oasis. Accessions to their strength, and a growing belief in Italian timidity, had encouraged them to reoccupy and fortify Zanzur. A day’s march to the south, at Suani Beni Adem, a large force was concentrated, and it was reported that in all some twenty thousand men had collected to the south and south-west of Tripoli,

at distances varying from a dozen to thirty miles. The situation seemed to present an admirable opportunity to the Italians, and to call for immediate action. But immediate action on a large scale was out of the question. It had been decided to release the '88 class of conscripts from service at the beginning of April, at the expiration of the six months for which they had originally been called up ; and the raw soldiers of the '91 class could scarcely be sent into the field until they had had time to shake down into their new surroundings.

At the end of six months' campaigning the sum of success attained by Italian arms fell far short of expectation—fell short, too, of what might reasonably have been hoped. Perhaps Italian expectation had run too high ; the difficulties inherent in a desert campaign may not have been sufficiently appreciated at first, either by Government or people. On the other hand there is reason to think that the Italian military authorities, and public opinion in Europe, erred in the other direction, in magnifying the obstacles that lay in the way of a successful issue. For the misapprehension of the situation which seems to have existed in Europe the Italians themselves are largely responsible. When four months passed, the coolest months of the year, without an effort to enlarge the area of occupation, there was ample excuse for those who came to the conclusion that the Italians might prove unequal to the task they had assumed.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE FOURTH PHASE : RENEWED ACTIVITY

WITH the rumours of an advance from Tripoli, which caused a stir of expectation during the latter days of March, was mingled another rumour : that at last a landing was about to be effected in the neighbourhood of Zuara. It is generally understood that the occupation of Zuara, which lies about sixty miles west of Tripoli and about forty from the Tunis border, was included in the original plan of campaign, and that the troops detailed for this object were diverted to Tripoli when the aspect of the situation was so dramatically changed by the Arab rising in October. It is certain that as soon as the pressure upon Tripoli was relieved by the battle of Ain Zara the problem of landing a force near the Tunis border preoccupied the minds of the authorities. In December a division actually left Italy for Zuara, but the weather was so tempestuous that even an attempt to land was out of the question. For some time the transports lay off Tripoli or cruised along the coast, but there was no break in the unfavourable weather, and they were finally forced to return to Augusta. The intention of an immediate landing was abandoned, and the division, which had been on board ship for about a month, was broken up —some of its units remaining in Italy, others going to reinforce existing garrisons.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two squadrons of the Guides Cavalry were sent to Tripoli, raising the strength of the mounted arm with General Caneva to eight squadrons.

It is hardly a matter for surprise that the winter seas should have given the authorities pause. By waiting for a suitable day the troops could easily have been landed ; to provision them was another matter. The difficulty of landing stores, even in the ' port ' of Tripoli, had been the cause of much anxiety to those responsible for supplies, and it was realised that on the shallow and treacherous coast to the west there would be lengthy periods when the disembarkation of stores and ammunition would be all but impossible.

Though the question is obviously debatable, it would seem that the risks of a landing somewhere on the coast ought to have been taken at the earliest opportunity. In the worst event, it is difficult to believe that the troops could have been left without sufficient food and ammunition to keep them going, though they might doubtless have suffered extreme discomfort, and have been reduced to very short commons. The insistence upon a high standard in the supply services has its drawbacks as well as its advantages. In the present instance, the situation clearly called for the occupation of some point near the western frontier, if such occupation were in any way possible. The Turkish headquarters depended largely upon Tunis for its necessities, almost wholly for its comforts. Moreover, Turkish officers and Turkish gold, both essential to the Arab resistance, came over the Tunis border or landed on the coast, eluding without much difficulty the Italian blockading squadron, which was deficient both in numbers and, for winter work, in sea-keeping qualities. Zuara seems to have been the main landing-place for such contraband as was run by sea, and the main caravan routes from Ben Gardane pass within striking distance of the town. That the occupation of a strip of land on the coast would not

blockade the whole Tunis border was obvious ; but it was equally clear that by effecting a landing at Zuara, or some point west of it, and sending out flying columns to watch the caravan roads, the Turkish line of communication with Tunis would have to be changed to the much longer, more difficult, and more expensive route that follows the frontier as far as the Jebel. Unless the Jefara district on the Tripoli side of the frontier has been cruelly maligned by writers, cartographers, and actual inhabitants of Tripoli, any alternative route presented great difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

During the winter the coast between Zuara and the frontier was carefully inspected, and on various occasions a landing was effected by a small party of sailors, with the object of testing the conditions. These landings were mere reconnaissances, and the sailors had strict orders to re-embark if they came in touch with an enemy. Although they added to Italian knowledge, their result was not morally favourable to the Italian cause, all the more so as they were not quickly followed by definite offensive action. The Arabs saw in these reconnaissances, and in the failure of the Italians to effect a permanent lodgment on the coast west of Tripoli, a further confession of weakness ; and they were angered by the bombardments which were never followed by the expected landing.

The results of the reconnaissances were not satisfactory. It was reported that at Zuara the conditions were particularly unfavourable to the landing of a large body of troops, and the attention of the navy was devoted to finding another point on the coast where an expedition could be more readily disembarked. Along the whole coast, open as it

<sup>1</sup> It appears that the Turks succeeded in overcoming these difficulties, which were less formidable than had been expected. The communications with Tunis were hampered by the Italian landing at Bu Kamesh, but less so than had been hoped.

is to the prevailing winds of winter and fronted by poorly charted stretches of shoal water, the conditions presented great difficulties. Information commonly available seemed to point to Ras Makabes, a headland near the Tunis border which runs parallel with the coast and forms a long narrow lagoon, as the most promising landing-place ; and this headland was in fact finally chosen by the Italian authorities. But the selection of a landing-place was far from leading to immediate action, and the occupation of a point on the coast west of Tripoli was delayed until the approach of summer should facilitate the problem of supply.

In all probability the rumour of a landing at Zuara, which was persistent in Tripoli at the end of March, was deliberately fostered by headquarters. Clearly something was afoot. Transports lay in Tripoli harbour, and troops were openly embarked—a battalion of Bersaglieri, a battalion of the 37th, a machine gun section and a detachment of Askaris. Later two battalions of Grenadiers were embarked, and these actually made a feint of attempting to land at Zuara, in order to cover the real movement further to the west. On the morning of April 8 Italian torpedo boats appeared off Zuara and remained there, taking soundings close in-shore, and to all appearance heralding an attempt to land. On the following morning a number of transports, escorted by warships, appeared on the scene. The positions occupied by the enemy were at once bombarded and firing continued most of the day. At dawn on the 10th the troops were put into boats, but no attempt was made to land, the rough weather affording sufficient excuse for delay to an onlooker. Firing continued at intervals all night, in order to keep up the pretence and hoodwink the Turks, but next morning the ships steamed away, their object accomplished.

Meanwhile a division under General Garioni (the Fifth

Division of the Expeditionary Force) had left Italy early on the morning of April 7. More than half of the troops were fresh from home, but General Lequio's Mixed Brigade (Bersaglieri and Grenadiers) came from Tripoli to complete the division, and a battalion of Askaris was included for scouting purposes. The transports, which were escorted by warships, rendezvous'd off Zuara, but out of sight of land, on the afternoon of April 9, and proceeded slowly towards Ras Makabes. Arriving towards midnight, they lay well off the coast till dawn, but a landing party of sailors with machine guns and a company of engineers was embarked in launches, and set out for the headland while it was still dark. They reached the extremity of the headland at daybreak, disembarked, and began to throw up trenches. They were followed at eight o'clock by the first boatload of infantry, and by eleven the bulk of the troops were disembarked, in spite of the difficulties occasioned by a heavy wind and lumpy sea. A strong detachment pushed eastward along the peninsula for about four miles and entrenched there, ensuring an ample base. There were no signs of the enemy, and the day passed quietly, while the landing of stores and matériel was continued with all speed.

On the following morning a landing on the mainland was effected without opposition. A force consisting of a detachment of sailors and one company each of Askaris, sappers, and Customs Guards, crossed the bay in boats and occupied the small deserted fort of Bu Kamesh. There was still no sign of an enemy and it was not until the next day that landing operations were disturbed. A considerable number of Arabs, estimated by General Garioni at about a thousand, occupied the dunes round the fort and kept up an annoying fire upon the boats crossing the bay. It was necessary to dislodge these groups, the more so as the

garrison of the fort consisted only of one company of Askaris and a few Customs Guards, and on the morning of April 13 General Garioni took advantage of a strong *Ghibli*, or desert wind, to attempt a surprise attack. The sand-storm enabled the remainder of the Askaris, who were still on the peninsula, to march unseen along the shore of the bay and take the Arabs in the flank. The movement was successful and the Arabs were driven off. Next day the 60th regiment crossed the bay, and the Bu Kamesh position was extended to include a line of dunes which dominated both the fort and the bay.

During the weeks which followed no important movement took place. General Garioni sent out frequent reconnaissances in force, and as a result of one of these, on May 3, a force of Turco-Arabs, estimated at two thousand, was put to flight with heavy loss. There were other encounters of no strategical significance, where some hard knocks were given and taken. The Italian official accounts report that on each occasion the movements designed were successfully carried out, and the enemy were always forced to retire. On the other hand, news from the Turkish side claimed that during April and May the Italians suffered six defeats and were only saved from total discomfiture by their heavy guns. Such conflicting accounts naturally puzzled public opinion, and helped to increase the prevailing doubt as to Italy's capacity for accomplishing her task. The question of news from the Turkish side will be discussed more fully in a later chapter. Meanwhile, it is enough to say that during the months which I spent in Tripoli I found little reason to look with suspicion on Italian accounts of the military operations, while, on the other hand, I was generally unable to make the reports from the other side fit in with my personal experience.

The next move on the Italian side took place at Homs. The occupation of the Mergheb on February 27 had relieved the town from the constant sniping and occasional artillery fire which had harassed it throughout many weeks, but the Turks still remained in force in the immediate neighbourhood, their headquarters being about three miles from the Italian lines, among the melancholy ruins of Lebda—the Leptis Magna of Roman days, and birthplace of the Emperor Septimius Severus. General Reisoli determined to extend his lines, and put an end to the annoyance created by the proximity of the enemy, and early on the morning of May 2 an Italian force divided into two columns marched out to the south-east, while a third column took up a position south-east of the Mergheb, to protect the flank and rear of the attacking columns. The first column, consisting of two battalions, pushed along the coast to Lebda, driving the Arabs before it, while the second column, three battalions of quick-marching Bersaglieri, was sent on a turning movement to the right, its eventual objective being a hill on the coast two miles beyond Lebda. The movement was entirely successful. The Turks and Arabs were taken by surprise, and when the Bersaglieri appeared on their left they retreated, slowly at first and fighting bravely, but finally in complete confusion. Towards evening they were reinforced, and made a determined but unsuccessful attempt to pierce the Italian lines between Lebda and Homs. In the morning there was a good deal of bayonet work, and General Reisoli reported that the enemy lost about three hundred killed. The Italian casualties were : one officer and nine men killed, three officers and fifty-nine men wounded.

May passed without any further offensive movement of importance on the part of the Italians. The interest of

the war shifted from Tripoli to the Aegean islands, where the occupation of Rhodes, and especially General Ameglio's brilliant little action at Psithos, resulting in the capture of two thousand Turkish regulars, salved the growing impatience of Italian public opinion. The forces in Tripoli and in Cyrenaica were reduced in order to form the expedition to Rhodes, and the feeling became general that all further action would be postponed until after the summer heats. Correspondents and volunteers returned to Italy, assured that there would be nothing worth seeing till September at earliest, and the soldiers had long settled down to various peaceful operations.

Chief among these were the construction of a wall twelve feet high along the main line of trenches encircling Tripoli, the building of redoubts between Tajura and Ain Zara, and the laying of railway lines to Tajura and Gargaresh.

The announcement that a sort of Chinese wall was to be built round Tripoli gave rise to a good deal of acid comment in the town, both in civilian and in military circles. Perhaps the most pointed criticism was that of a well-known Roman, who suggested that it was designed as a protection from the *Ghibli*. In any case, whether the purpose of its erection was military or climatic, the wall afforded a much needed occupation to troops who had been kicking their heels for a matter of months.

A similar useful purpose was served by the railway. The workmen who had been engaged since the beginning of February on the leisurely beginnings of the Tripolitan railway system expressed a desire to return to their homes. They were immediately shipped back to Italy, and the work was handed over to the soldiers, who tackled it with a will.

To all appearance Tripoli had settled down for the

WORK ON THE AIN ZARA RAILWAY



THE LANDING OF THE FIRST LOCOMOTIVE IN TRIPOLI





summer, and the attention of Italy was concentrated upon the Aegean, when the startling news came over the wires that at last General Caneva had made a move to the westward, had fought a stiff battle, inflicting heavy loss upon the enemy, and had occupied a position which dominated the oasis of Zanzur.

It is fairly certain that the decision to make this move was taken at the last moment. An officer of General Caneva's own staff had left for Italy at the beginning of June, assured by his general that he could safely take leave, as no early move was intended. A number of Red Cross surgeons, moreover, left at the same time, and these would hardly have been sent home on the eve of a big engagement, if the engagement had been already planned by the commander-in-chief. Speculation has been rife as to the reasons which induced General Caneva, at an unfavourable season, to take the step which might have been taken at any time during the previous six months. It was reported in Italy by officers who returned from the front, that a few days before the battle General Caneva received news that the enemy contemplated an attack in force, and that he chose to anticipate them by delivering his attack upon Zanzur position before they could concentrate upon selected points in his long line of trenches. Whether this explanation be true or fictitious, the movement was entirely successful ; and the moral effect of a victory in the open and the occupation of a new position was incomparably greater than that of a successful defence against a Turco-Arab attempt to rush the Tripoli lines.

On June 8, at 3.30 A.M., General Camerana's division left Gargaresh in two columns. The objective of the movement was the small hill, or rather hillock, which lies between the sea and the eastern extremity of the Zanzur oasis, and

is crowned by the shrine of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil. The two brigades of the division advanced in echelon. On the right and in advance, between the Zanzur road and the sea, was General Giardina's brigade, consisting of the 6th and 40th regiments, a company of Customs Guards, and two mountain batteries. On the left was General Rainaldi's infantry brigade, consisting of the 82nd and 84th regiments, with three batteries of field artillery. At 5 A.M. General Giardina's brigade came in touch with a considerable body of the enemy, strongly posted in deep narrow trenches, which were connected with sheltered ground in the rear by cross trenches five or six feet deep. The defenders were practically invisible, and an attempt to drive them out by rifle fire was not successful. General Giardina sent a battalion of the 40th along the shore towards Sidi Abd-el-Jelil, to outflank the entrenched enemy and occupy the high ground, but the Arabs stuck to their trenches and blocked the main advance. At length, after a wait of more than an hour, the whole brigade was sent in against the entrenched positions. Supported by the fire of the mountain guns and of the *Carlo Alberto*, the men advanced by short rushes across the absolutely open ground. They suffered considerable loss, but there was no check; the line of grey coats swept on and into the trenches. Some of the Arabs were already in full retreat, but a number stayed and fought to the last. The fighting was hand-to-hand, and the Arabs came off very badly against the Italian bayonet charges.

By this advance the Turco-Arab forces between the road and the sea were driven right back on to the oasis of Zanzur, the position of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil was occupied, and the nominal objective of the Italian movement was attained. Meanwhile General Rainaldi's brigade, coming into action

a little later, had carried the trenches to the south of the road and were driving the enemy back to the line of dunes that runs south-east from the oasis. A strong body of Turks and Arabs rallied on a green dune which stands out vividly against the surrounding grey and ochre, and here a fierce struggle took place. In spite of a hail of shrapnel from the field batteries, the enemy held obstinately to their position on the green dune until the 82nd and 84th turned them out at the point of the bayonet.

By 7.30 the objective of the advance had been gained and the Turco-Arab forces had been driven back all along the line of defences which had been constructed to protect Zanzur. But as the battle lulled with the completion of its first phase, it entered upon a second phase, on a larger scale and along a more extended line than the first.

As was to be expected, the sound of battle brought up all the Turks and Arabs within striking distances, from Fonduk El Tokar, Fonduk Maggusa and Suani Beni Adem. At 7.30 a large force appeared to the south, advancing with great rapidity. Groups of Arabs had already threatened the left of General Rainaldi's brigade, but the main body, which now appeared on the scene, directed its attack upon the Italian reserve south of Gargaresh. This force, under General Carpeneto, consisted of two battalions of the 37th, three companies of Askaris, the entire cavalry force available—two regiments—and a battery of mountain guns. The Askaris and the cavalry were sent out to meet the Turco-Arab attack on Gargaresh, while the left wing of General Rainaldi's brigade found itself heavily engaged east of the green dune. General Rainaldi had not much difficulty in rolling back the attack on his left, but the movement on Gargaresh was carried out in the most determined manner. The Askaris and the cavalry were rein-

forced by a battalion of the 37th and a mountain battery but the enemy, in greatly superior numbers, began to threaten the Italian left. The cavalry prolonged their lines eastwards and a battalion of the 84th, with a battery of field artillery, was sent back in support, while the field guns and six-inch guns at Gargaresh opened a heavy fire. The Askaris were ordered to fall back upon the supporting battalions, and as they retired, slowly and in good order the enemy came on in triumph.

The moment must have been a happy one for the attacking forces. At last the Italians were fairly in the open their main body far from the fortified lines behind which they had lain for so long. To those who had hurried up from the south the result of the first phase of the fight was not yet fully clear, and no doubt they believed that in the desert the Italians stood no chance ; while in front of them the enemy was falling back on Gargaresh, hard-pressed, to all appearance, by the Arab fire. The small numbers of the Italian force opposed to them perhaps led to the conclusion that General Caneva had weakened his defensive lines unduly in order to make the advance on Zanzur and may even have given rise to the hope that a bold dash would take the attacking forces straight in upon Tripoli.

All at once the retiring Italians ceased to retire, and delivered a sudden counter-stroke, pressed home with the bayonet. At the same moment the attacking forces found themselves taken in the flank by a provisional brigade of Italian troops commanded by General Montuori,<sup>1</sup> which had left the oasis at Bu Meliana and marched over the dunes some ten kilometres to the scene of the battle. In

<sup>1</sup> The brigade was formed out of the reserve battalions of General De Chaurand's division. General Montuori acted as brigadier, but the column, which included a mountain battery and was joined later by the cavalry brigade, was under the command of General De Chaurand.

a few minutes the aspect of the fight was completely altered. The Turco-Arab forces retreated in disorder, only extricating themselves by means of their extreme mobility.

It was now noon, and the Turks and Arabs were in full retreat all along the lines, except at the edge of the Zanzur oasis, where a strong force, with a good proportion of regulars, was stubbornly disputing the Italian advance. Relieved of the pressure on his left, General Rainaldi attacked strongly, drove the enemy from their positions, and pursued them for some miles. By one o'clock the battle was practically over, as far as the Italian right was concerned, and the afternoon was spent in throwing up trenches to defend the Sidi Abd-el-Jelil position, which was to be permanently occupied.

The left wing, on the other hand, was comparatively busy up till five o'clock. Fresh bodies of the enemy came up from the south-east, from the direction of Fonduk Ben Gashir and Bir Tobras, and joined with those already in the neighbourhood in further unavailing attacks. One strong force attempted to cross the front of General Montuori's brigade and swing in towards Gargaresh. They ignored the flanking fire of the brigade and the mountain battery which accompanied it, and did not check until they were met by a counter-attack by the 37th regiment, which drove them back upon the brigade. They fought bravely and recklessly, but the odds were far too heavy ; the fire of the Italian infantry, assisted by the cavalry brigade, routed them completely. A last attempt to turn the fortunes of the day was easily repulsed, and by five o'clock the battle was definitely over. General Giardina's brigade, with the field artillery, remained at Sidi Abd-el-Jelil. The other troops returned to their quarters at Tripoli and Gargaresh.

Although the fight of June 8<sup>1</sup> was of no great strategical importance, it had a value, and has an interest, from other points of view. In the first place it dealt the Turco-Arab combination a severe blow. Their ascertained loss in killed alone was close upon a thousand, a large number of wounded were taken prisoner, and no doubt very many others were temporarily put out of action, though the merciful nature of the Italian bullet and the extraordinary hardness of the Arab render the tale of wounded far less important than its numbers would imply. The heaviest losses were sustained in the trenches rushed by General Giardina's brigade, which were strewn thick with corpses, and at the green dune, where a detachment of regulars resisted to the death the bayonet assault of the 82nd and 84th. The Italian casualties were : one officer and thirty-eight men killed, thirteen officers and two hundred and seventy-eight men wounded. The main losses were sustained by the 6th and 40th regiments, in their attack upon the trenches north of the Zanzur road, and by the Askaris, who bore the brunt of the attack from the south, previous to the arrival of General De Chaurand's troops. The three companies of Askaris lost ten killed and seventy-five wounded.

It is only right to say that the Turkish official accounts give very different casualty lists. They report that the Italians lost over a thousand killed, while their own loss was a hundred and fifty killed and three hundred wounded. The latter figures may perhaps be accounted for on the supposition that the authorities chose to report Turkish losses alone, ignoring the far heavier casualties among their Arab allies. The estimate of the Italian loss must be purely imaginative. The Turks and Arabs were com-

<sup>1</sup> Officially known as the battle of Zanzur.

pletely routed, and had no means of computing the casualties suffered by the victors. The Italians, on the other hand, remained in full possession of the battlefield, and the number of bodies actually counted during the next few days fell little short of a thousand.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the fact that Turkish accounts have been proved, over and over again, to be almost ridiculously inaccurate, the ordinary probabilities would fully bear out the Italian figures. Disciplined troops, superior in numbers and backed by excellent artillery, are bound to inflict upon Arab irregulars a loss very many times greater than they are likely to suffer themselves. It has already been remarked that the Tripolitan Arab is a wild shot, and all his mobility and bravery cannot avail against the superior fire and superior numbers of his adversary. Moreover, the experience at the Arab trenches showed that when it came to hand-to-hand fighting the Italian bayonets made light of whatever weapons the Arabs could bring against them. It is a well-established fact that with the adoption of the rifle as their main weapon, the desert tribes of Africa have lost much of their ancient prowess with the *arme blanche*. Their method of warfare has changed. They prefer to snipe rather than to rush, and when they do become involved in a hand-to-hand fight they are no match at all for European-trained bayonets.

The total number of Italian troops engaged in the battle was over thirteen thousand men, with three batteries of field and three of mountain artillery. In addition, a field battery and a six-inch battery at Gargaresh came into action against the Arabs from the south, until the arrival of General De Chaurand relieved the pressure. The Turco-

<sup>1</sup> Five hundred and forty-five bodies were found in the limited area covered by the advance of General Giardina's brigade alone.

Arab forces have been variously estimated. One account puts them at twelve thousand men in all, a number which is scouted as ridiculous by one or two writers who were not on the spot. Direct information from eyewitnesses on the Italian side inclines me to a minimum estimate of ten thousand men. Probably a greater number was engaged, for it is certain that every available man within reach of Zanzur or Gargaresh was hurried to the scene of battle. Correspondents in the Turkish camp have described the keenness and confidence with which an Italian forward movement was awaited, and the advance upon Sidi Abd-el-Jelil must have been hailed with delight by every Arab within striking distance. On the other hand, various detachments arrived at widely separated intervals, and the number engaged at any given movement must have been considerably less than the total estimated figure.

The battle has some tactical interest. From the account given, it will be observed that the tactics of the Turks and Arabs were marked by a lack of co-ordination between the various bodies engaged. The nearest approach to a thought-out movement seems to have been the attack upon the Italian reserve south of Gargaresh. The attack was delayed until a sufficiently large force had collected, and the attempt to strike a blow at the Italian base gave indication of a controlling mind. This attempt was completely foiled by the arrival of General De Chaurand's column from Bu Meliana, and the rest of the fighting was of a disjointed nature. Bodies of Arabs hurried to the scene from the various camps in the neighbourhood, and dashed independently at what they judged were the most likely spots in the Italian line. Outnumbered, outranged and outmanœuvred, they had no chance of crowning their brave attempts with any measure of success.

On the Italian side, the most interesting feature of the battle was the part played by the provisional brigade. It was owing to the forethought and urgent representations of General De Chaurand, commanding the 3rd Division, that a provisional brigade was formed and held in readiness at Bu Meliana. The timely arrival of these five battalions, under the personal direction of General De Chaurand, combined with the temporary withdrawal of the Askaris and the 37th to entrap and finally rout the forces threatening the Italian left.

Some critics have made capital out of the fact that the Italians did not occupy the whole oasis of Zanzur after the battle of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil. They have alleged that General Caneva intended to occupy the oasis, that he failed to do so but said that he had succeeded. An effective occupation of the oasis would probably have served Italian interests better ; but at this date there was no intention of doing more than establish a strong outpost near enough to dominate the oasis and prevent it from being used as a Turkish base. While there were forcible arguments in favour of occupying Zanzur itself, the experience of Tripoli seemed against the establishment of another garrison in the midst of an insidious labyrinth of palm-gardens. To occupy the whole oasis effectively would have tied up a larger force than General Caneva cared to use for the purpose, and in Tripoli there was a notable reluctance to adopt the blockhouse system, which General Briccola and others had successfully employed.<sup>1</sup> The height of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil seemed to dominate Zanzur sufficiently to prevent its being effectively occupied by the Turks and Arabs, and

<sup>1</sup> It was not until May that a line of blockhouses was built along the southern margin of the oasis, from Tajura to Fornaci (between Tripoli and Ain Zara).

this, apart from the heavy blow dealt by the actual fight, was so much clear gain. The situation subsequent to the battle was succinctly described to me by an Italian staff-officer in the following words : 'The oasis of Zanzur is not occupied by us, but we patrol it frequently. So does the opposite side it seems ! but at different hours !'

The echoes of the Zanzur fight had barely died away when news arrived of a sharp encounter at Homs. At four o'clock on the morning of June 12 a large force of Arabs attacked one of the Italian blockhouses to the east of Lebda, and the attack developed all along the line held by the 89th regiment. The Arabs succeeded in getting through the wire entanglements round the blockhouse, which was held by two officers and forty-six men of the 89th. They set fire to the blockhouse, and less than half of the little garrison succeeded in cutting its way to the next blockhouse. The rest, including the two officers, were either killed by the Arabs or burnt. The attack was made by a much more numerous force than had showed itself in the neighbourhood of Homs since the occupation of the Mergheb,<sup>1</sup> and was supported by artillery fire, but General Reisoli countered vigorously, and succeeded in getting home with a heavy blow. While the enemy were slowly being driven back from the trenches, a battalion of Bersaglieri executed a rapid flanking march and succeeded in cutting off a detachment of Arabs. These were hemmed in between the Bersaglieri and the 89th and none escaped. At this spot four hundred and twenty-one bodies were afterwards counted, and the total number of killed approached seven hundred. The Italian losses were two officers and twenty-nine men killed (nearly all in the block-

<sup>1</sup> The Turco-Arab forces round Homs were reported to have been reinforced by a large number of tribesmen from the Sirt district.

house), and two officers and fifty-seven men wounded. By 8.15 the Turks and Arabs were in full retreat, and this was the last occasion upon which the Homs district was the scene of any fighting worthy of the name.

The spell of inaction now seemed to be thoroughly broken, and during the sultry weeks which followed the Italians displayed a greater energy than at any time since the early stages of the war. On the night of June 15 an Italian expedition under General Camerana appeared off Misurata, escorted by Admiral Borea Ricci's 'school' division of obsolete warships, and at dawn on the following morning a landing was effected under the protecting fire of the *Re Umberto*. The troops which made up the expeditionary force came from Derna, Benghazi, Rhodes, Tripoli, and Italy; and General Fara was at length given a brigade destined to perform active work, after a long spell in command of the reserve brigade in Tripoli town.

The landing was accomplished without much difficulty, and by the evening of the 16th a base was securely established at Marsa Bu Sheifa. The headland Ras Zurug, the highest point on the whole Tripolitan coast, was also occupied by the troops, and the sailors were re-embarked the same night. Scattered attacks were made by the Arabs during the day from the direction of Misurata, which lies some eight miles from the Italian landing-place, and in the afternoon a brisk skirmish took place on the Italian right. The Italians lost two men killed and nine wounded, but at six o'clock the Arabs drew off, leaving, according to General Camerana's report, about fifty men killed, together with a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition.

The Arabs seemed to be in no great force in the neighbourhood of Misurata, or if they were, they showed no inclination to come to grips with the Italians. Perhaps

those of the population who were anxious to fight had attached themselves to the forces near Homs—some perhaps had even gone farther afield and joined the Turkish headquarters in the neighbourhood of Tripoli. Accounts from correspondents in the Turkish camp have insisted on the solidarity of Arab feeling, reporting the arrival of warriors from every district of Tripolitania. Possibly it was for this reason, and not from any lack of will to oppose the invader, that the week which followed the first skirmish passed quietly, while the usual work of preparing an adequate base was completed by the Italians at leisure. Reconnaissances showed that the oasis was empty, and it was not until June 23 that a squadron of cavalry reported the presence of an Arab force to the eastward.

The next move came from General Garioni at Bu Kamesh. At dawn on June 27 the Italians attacked the Arab positions before the height known as Sidi Said, which lies at the base of the peninsula of Ras Makabes. While the main body of the Italians attacked the position from the front, a flying column outflanked the Arab left, with the result that the enemy, in force estimated at six thousand, were thrown back in disorder on Sidi Said and abandoned their camp. The frontal attack had been strongly resisted, and the Italians lost twenty-nine killed and one hundred and fourteen wounded, including two officers, while General Garioni reported that the Arabs left five hundred dead in the trenches carried by his troops.

During the night the Arabs were reinforced, and when the Italians attacked Sidi Said next morning, a stout resistance was offered. But the odds were too great. The Italians attacked with two strong columns, one from the peninsula, the other from the position gained the day before, and by nine o'clock the enemy were rolled back

part of the Misurata oasis, the Arabs entirely failed to hold that the line of the Titalian advance lay through the eastern of which they are sometimes capable. In spite of the fact that the Arabs did not resist with the whole-hearted tenacity difficult terrain, and it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that morning of July 8 that General Camerano left his base campaign had again been adhered to, and it was not until by an advance upon Misurata from the Titalian base at Bu Shiefa. The leisurely methods characteristic of the General Garioni's forward movement was followed shortly

watch the movements of the Titalians.

Regeadahine, leaving detachments at Zelten and Sidi Ali to sances proved that the bulk of the Arabs had retired upon the previous day's fighting, and in fact further reconnaissance. This incident sufficiently indicates the result of safety. Troops who went on and brought back the aeroplane in Kamesh, and was eventually met by a column of Titalian lines. Leaving his machine he set out on foot for Bu ground safely at a distance of nine miles from the Titalian motor. He came down in a long glide and reached the and was forced to descend owing to the stoppage of his effectually cleared of Arabs. On the following day one of the Titalian armament exploded in the desert to the southward, By this action the neighbourhood of Bu Kamesh was ten killed, including one officer, and seventy-eight wounded. With arms, ammunition, and cattle. The Titalians lost of wounded were left in the hands of the Titalians, together loss in killed reacted a couple of hundred, while a number that the Turks retreated early in the action, leaving the Arabs to sustain the final attacks. The Turco-Arab from Sidi Said, completely routed. General Garioni reported

their own, or to inflict upon the Italians such loss as might reasonably have been expected, taking into consideration the difficulties of the ground, and the fact that the defending force was estimated at five thousand rifles. A battalion sent along the seashore, on the extreme right, succeeded in outflanking the enemy, and appears to have set them on the run. In any case, the Arabs were swept through the oasis, and upon reaching Misurata they continued their flight, without making any attempt to hold the town. Their losses were heavy. Within twenty-four hours more than three hundred bodies were buried, and during the days which followed the Italian patrols discovered and buried many more. The Italian losses, on the other hand, were comparatively slight—twenty-three killed and a hundred and nineteen wounded.

The occupation of Misurata was in a sense the most important achievement in Tripolitania since the early days of the war. Next to Tripoli itself Misurata is the most considerable centre in the *vilayet*, regarded from the stand-points of commerce and of population. The district is fertile and comparatively well cultivated, while the town manufactures woollen and silk baracans, a tough matting exported in considerable quantity, and two types of carpet which find a ready market in Egypt. The population of the town approaches ten thousand, while that of the oasis is calculated at about thirty-five thousand. Obviously, the occupation of such a centre was bound to have a marked effect upon the course of the campaign.

Within a few days the town took on some appearance of its normal activity. Considerable numbers of Arabs who had fled in haste before the Italian onset returned to resume their occupations, when they found that the invaders were not the devils that their fancy, and Turkish ingenuity,

had painted. They were perhaps the more inclined to make submission to the Italians, since the Turks had been the first to seek safety in flight during the advance on Misurata, and a natural anger had been kindled against those who had inspired resistance and then betrayed it.

For nearly a fortnight scattered bodies of Arabs hung upon the western margin of the oasis, making no attempt upon the Italian positions, but harassing the dwellers in the district and carrying off provisions and cattle. The inhabitants appealed to the Italians for protection, and at dawn on July 20 General Fara's brigade moved out, swept the oasis clear of lurking detachments of Arabs, and crossed the stretch of desert that divides the oasis of Misurata from the small oasis of Gheran, where the enemy had concentrated in some force. The Italian advance was stoutly contested, but the Arabs were eventually driven back, leaving many dead on the field—reports say more than three hundred ; while the Italian losses amounted to nineteen killed and eighty-seven wounded. An excessively hot day tried the Italian troops severely, but they marched and fought with their usual steadiness and precision, returning to their quarters at Misurata in the afternoon, after an arduous day. General Fara is generally thought to have pushed this advance too far, considering the season and the difficult going. The men were thoroughly exhausted before their return.

Meanwhile General Garioni had kept up the game of turn-and-turn-about which had been played by himself and General Camerana. On July 14 he pushed forward from Sidi Said to Sidi Ali, which was occupied by an inconsiderable detachment of Arabs. The position was taken without difficulty, and an attempt on the part of the Turco-Arab forces to win a straight fight in the open met with

inevitable failure. A strong force, estimated by General Garioni at between five and six thousand men, arrived from Zelten and Regdaline and flung itself upon the Italian right. The attack was readily repulsed, and in a counter-attack the Italians got home with the bayonet. Before long the Arabs were in full retreat, pursued by a heavy artillery fire. General Garioni reported that several hundred dead were found on the field, and a considerable number of wounded, while two days later he reported that a further search had resulted in the discovery of two hundred more bodies. The Italian losses are given as seventeen killed and seventy-three wounded.

Some critics have expressed the opinion that the occupation, successively, of Sidi Said and Sidi Ali had no importance, and would not affect the course of the campaign. Obviously, the positions had no strategic importance in themselves, but they signified steps on the way to Regdaline, which undoubtedly had a very real strategic importance. Moreover, it is idle to pretend that engagements in which the Italians inflicted severe losses upon their opponents would have no influence upon the result of the war. The strictly limited resources of the Turco-Arab combination, and the doubtful relations between Arab and Turk, gave an added force to every blow struck by the Italians—a force out of proportion to the apparent importance of a given engagement.

The results of the actions at Sidi Said and Sidi Ali became clearer three weeks later, when a landing was effected at Zuara, and the town and oasis were occupied almost without resistance. Elaborate preparations were taken to distract the attention of the enemy from the threatened quarter. Demonstrations were made in the Tripoli neighbourhood, to the south of Ain Zara and towards Fonduk El Tokar,



ZUARA  
Photograph taken from an Airship



which had the effect of drawing on considerable forces of the enemy. These, however, made no attempt to attack the Italian troops, who bivouacked in the open. The experiences of the previous two months had clearly destroyed the confidence formerly felt by the Arabs. On the morning of August 4 the demonstrations were renewed, but the enemy hung back, puzzled perhaps by the game of marching and counter-marching, but mindful no doubt of the previous occasions on which they had bumped their heads against a wall.

Meanwhile Zuara was being occupied. A brigade under General Tassoni, drawn partly from Italy and partly from the Tripoli garrisons, landed unopposed at a small inlet two miles to the east of the town ; while General Lequio's brigade set out in the early hours of the morning from Sidi Ali, and reached the western margin of the Zuara oasis at nine o'clock, after a trying march of twelve miles over very bad ground. Only the slightest resistance was encountered, from scattered groups of Arabs who opened a long range fire upon the advancing column. The Italians halted outside the oasis to await the arrival of General Tassoni's brigade, which reached the town about one o'clock. Both town and oasis were found abandoned. Most of the inhabitants had long ago removed themselves to Regdaline, and now it appeared that the fighting men, both Turks and Arabs, had realised the hopelessness of resistance.

A reconnaissance on August 15 found the immediate vicinity of Zuara free from any sign of the enemy, and on August 16 General Garioni ordered an advance towards Regdaline, where the northern caravan routes from Tunis converge at the eastern extremity of the arid waste that stretches on both sides of the frontier. The actual objective was the high ground known as Sidi Abd-es-Samad,

some six miles from Zuara and about a mile from Regdaline, dominating the caravan route and the three oases of Regdaline, Menshia, and Jemil. This position was taken without much opposition, the Italians driving back the advanced guard of the enemy on to the three oases already mentioned, where the main body of the Turco-Arabs was reported to be concentrated. The Italians opened an artillery fire upon the oasis of Regdaline, where some Turkish guns appeared to be located, but an Arab attack developed swiftly from the oasis of Menshia, which lies to the east of the Italian position. A strong force endeavoured to envelop the Italian left, but the cavalry and the Askaris held the advancing Arabs in check, while they in turn were taken in the flank by the Italian supporting troops, who pushed forward rapidly in spite of the pitiless sun, already high in the heavens. The enemy clung obstinately to the houses and gardens on the edge of the oasis, and the fight continued most of the day, along a total front of about four miles. Towards evening the Arabs abandoned the positions they had so gallantly defended, and on the following morning reconnaissances reported that the three oases were all empty. The Italians lost twelve killed and ninety-eight wounded, including five officers, while the Arab losses were said to be heavy. As a matter of fact, the opposing troops do not seem to have been very closely engaged. The Arabs were penned in their positions, unable to advance against the heavy fire of the Italians, while the latter do not appear to have made any attempt to press home an attack upon the oases. General Garioni had reached his objective, and it is probable that he was disinclined to incur the loss which would have resulted from a determined onslaught upon the Arab positions.

Perhaps the most interesting part of General Garioni's

report is to be found in the laconic sentences which commend the working of his transport services : ' All services worked perfectly. The motors permitted the conveyance of an ample supply of water and ice to the troops, and the rapid removal of the wounded from the firing line.' *Ice* on a battlefield, in August, in North Africa ! It is improbable that troops on active service have ever been fed and cared for like the Italian expeditionary force in Tripoli. Even granting that the troops have never moved far from their bases, the standard fixed and reached by the commissariat services has been remarkable.

Reconnaissances carried out during the next three weeks revealed no trace of the enemy, who had moved out of touch with General Garioni's command. It seemed that they had little stomach for further fighting, and signs were not wanting that the feeling was becoming general. During the month of August and the first fortnight of September more than four thousand inhabitants of the Tripoli neighbourhood made their way from the Turkish side to the Italian—no inconsiderable number, in view of the measures which had naturally been taken to prevent such transference. The policy of going out and hitting whenever a chance presented was bound to have its effect. The extreme mobility of the Arabs and the leisurely methods of the Italians had combined to prevent a really decisive action, but the cumulative weight of successive hard knocks was telling upon the Turco-Arab combination.

The month of August wore to an end without any further movement on the Italian side, and only one sign of activity on the part of the enemy. On the 30th groups of Arabs made a demonstration to the west of the Italian lines at Misurata, while other groups attacked the line of communication with Bu Sheifa, the base on the coast. The

Arabs were easily driven off, and no further encounter of any importance took place in this district.

On September 2 the Government took a step which had long been indicated as desirable, dividing the command of the troops in Libya. Though General Briccola had to some extent exercised an independent command in Cyrenaica, he had nominally been subordinate to General Caneva, who had been entrusted with the functions of governor and commander-in-chief in both provinces. It had not been sufficiently realised that Tripolitania and Cyrenaica presented two distinct problems, and the division of responsibility between a general who was on the spot, and a commander-in-chief who remained permanently at a distance of four hundred miles, hardly seemed the best method of solving the difficulties which confronted the Italians in the eastern province. The feeling was practically universal that with the division into two commands the task of penetration would at length begin, and the retirement of General Caneva gave additional encouragement to this belief. Rightly or wrongly, his name had become identified with the policy of extreme caution which had aroused criticism in Italy as well as in other countries, and his return to Italy seemed to promise a more vigorous autumn campaign. While General Briccola became Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Cyrenaica, the corresponding post in Tripolitania was entrusted to General Ragni, who had succeeded General Frugoni in command of the Tripoli Army Corps.

Meanwhile, the prospects of an early peace were gradually brightening. Turkey had long realised that the Tripolitan provinces were irretrievably lost, and that the defence made by her troops, but still more the ability shown in organising the Arab resistance, had done enough for honour.

For the sake of prestige, and with the natural desire to put Italy to the maximum of expense and trouble, the Porte had let the war run on till in point of fact they stood to lose prestige with the Arab race, rather than gain it, if they prolonged any further a struggle in which the Padishah was proving himself helpless to assist in a defence of the faith. The dilemma was serious enough, but realisation was dawning that a continuance of the war might lead to embarrassments greater than any which would be caused by a tardy acquiescence in an inevitable loss.

On July 12 secret pourparlers had been initiated at Lausanne between Prince Said Halim and an Italian Commission of three : Signor Bertolini, Signor Fusinato, and Signor Volpi. The fall of Said Pasha's ministry put an end to these conversations, but on August 12 they were resumed at Caux, the new Turkish representatives being Naby Bey and Fahreddin Bey. The earlier discussions revealed a wide gulf between the standpoints of the two Governments, and only a full realisation and a patient acceptance of Turkish methods of bluff could have encouraged the Italian delegates to persevere with their conversations through so many weeks. After nearly a month's discussion the rumour became persistent that peace would be concluded in October, and at last rumour proved correct. But before an agreement was reached, two important engagements were fought, one in each of the Tripolitan provinces, which may perhaps have had a compelling effect upon Turkish reluctance.

The anticipation of an increased activity consequent upon the division of the field of operations into two commands was not disappointed. Though rumours of peace were persistent, the generals commanding realised that the surest way of translating these rumours into a satisfactory

reality was to pursue the military operations in Libya with adequate vigour.

The hope that the position of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil, occupied on June 8, would sufficiently dominate the oasis of Zanzur to prevent any important concentration of the enemy in the neighbourhood, had not been fully realised ; while for many weeks the situation had been as I have already described, a change gradually took place, and large numbers of Arabs collected to the west of the oasis, on both sides of the Wady Hira. Perhaps it was in the minds of Turkish and Arab leaders that a simultaneous attack upon Tripoli and Sidi Abd-el-Jelil might have an influence upon the trend of the peace negotiations. The Italian Intelligence Department was much preoccupied by rumours of such an attack. If this was actually the intention of Neshat Bey, his projected movement was anticipated by a severe blow from his adversary, and if the peace discussions were influenced, it was not in the direction desired.

On the historic anniversary of September 20<sup>1</sup> General Ragni put in motion a force which was designed to clear the enemy from the neighbourhood of Zanzur by permanently occupying positions to the south and west of the oasis. Apparently the choice of date was not due to a desire to celebrate the anniversary in a fitting manner, but to a hope of deceiving the enemy. It was given out that a great review would take place on September 20, in the hope that this would account for the preparations which it was impossible to conceal.

It was anticipated that the battle would follow the lines of the battle of Zanzur, and would be divided into two phases : first, the advance through the oasis and the occupation of positions to the south and west ; second, an

<sup>1</sup> The day on which the troops of United Italy entered Rome.

encounter with the Arab forces which were expected to arrive towards midday from the camps to the southward.

The attack on the oasis was entrusted to General De Chaurand, who had two brigades under his command : General Salazar's brigade (82nd and 84th regiments) from the First Division, and a provisional brigade from his own division,<sup>1</sup> under the command of General Tommasoni. The division was accompanied by four batteries of mountain guns, a battery of field guns, an engineer battalion, two squadrons of the Lodi cavalry, and the 2nd Askari battalion. In reserve under General Maggiotto were the second brigade of the First Division (6th and 40th regiments), a company of Customs Guards, an engineer battalion and two field batteries. This reserve was stationed between Gargaresh and Sidi Abd-el-Jelil, and a flying column under General Carpeneto, consisting of the 11th Bersaglieri (lately returned to Tripoli from Zuara), the Firenze Lancers, and a battalion of Tripolitan levies, was thrown out to the south of Gargaresh. The whole force numbered eleven thousand eight hundred rifles, five hundred and fifty sabres and lances, and thirty-four guns. General Ragni directed the operations in person.

General De Chaurand's division advanced in two columns a little after dawn. General Salazar's brigade, advancing along the line of the road between the oasis and the sea, divided near the tomb of Sidi Suleiman, the 84th pressing on towards the little hill crowned by the tomb of Sidi Bilal, to the west of the Wady Hira, while the 82nd swung to the left and pushed through the western section of the oasis. General De Chaurand's intention was that the 82nd should advance in line and sweep the oasis by the methods which

<sup>1</sup> Eight companies of the 18th, eight companies of the 52nd, four companies of the 23rd and six companies of the 93rd.

had proved successful in the advance through the Tripoli oasis on November 26, but a misunderstanding seems to have arisen. The 82nd advanced in column and bore too far to the left, thereby losing touch with the 84th. Meanwhile General Tommasoni's brigade was skirting the southern margin of the oasis, having pushed past the green dune that had been the scene of hard fighting more than three months before. Both brigades, as they approached the western limits of the oasis, were met by a heavy fire from the enemy. The Arabs who had concentrated towards the west of the Wady Hira attacked strongly, especially towards the little eminence known as Sidi Mohammed Erbei, between the oasis of Zanzur proper and the outlying oasis of Mishasta, and their numbers when they had finally collected were calculated to be not less than six thousand. (The official account, based on information subsequently available, gives the precise estimate of six thousand seven hundred.)

By ten o'clock the 84th had occupied Sidi Bilal, and the 82nd had met the 18th, who formed the right-hand column of General Tommasoni's brigade, near Sidi Mohammed Erbei.

As the left-hand column of this brigade (the 52nd regiment) pressed on past the line of dunes which hems in the oasis of Zanzur on the south, news was brought by the airman, Captain Novelli, that large numbers of the enemy were hastening up from the south, while the lancer patrols reported an advance body of two thousand Arabs making direct for Zanzur.

Soon after, the 52nd were forced to halt and change front, in order to protect the flank of the division, and before long they were hotly engaged. Neshat Bey had concentrated at Suani Beni Adem a force of over five thousand

men, including some seven hundred Turkish regulars ; and with this formidable body of fighting men he delivered his last stroke in Tripolitania. The Turks remained in second line, but the Arabs attacked strongly, in an attempt to envelop the Italian left, and General Tommasoni sent forward the battalion of the 23rd, which he had in reserve, to assist the 52nd. Advancing in skirmishing order, with great rapidity, using the inequalities of the ground with admirable skill, the Arabs pushed forward without a check. They displayed magnificent courage, and neither shrapnel nor rifle-fire could stop their headlong onset. The battalion of the 23rd, in a fierce counter-attack, not only overran the limits of prudence, but masked the fire of the mountain batteries, which had delayed, though it could not check, the onslaught of the enemy. The silence of the guns encouraged the Arabs still further, and one detachment stormed the slopes which led to the batteries. A hand-to-hand struggle ensued, and the Italian gunners were forced to leave their guns and go forward with the bayonet. Two guns fell into the hands of the Arabs, but they were quickly recovered by a battalion of the 93rd, which appeared in the nick of time. The 93rd and the Askaris had been retained by General De Chaurand as a divisional reserve, and their arrival first checked the Arab attack, and finally flung it back in disorder. Seeing the determined nature of the Arab rushes, General Ragni had sent forward the reserve under General Maggiotto, and subsequently a battalion of the Bersaglieri, but these troops did not arrive on the scene until the Arabs were in full retreat, pursued for a couple of miles by the 93rd and the Askaris.

This struggle on the Italian left continued for nearly three hours. By one o'clock the fight had slackened, and the 52nd had a short breathing-space before they were

once more furiously attacked. The retreating Arabs were reinforced by a numerous fresh contingent from Fonduk Ben Gashir ; and a determined attack was made on the apex of the Italian position, where the 52nd, on the southern front, touched the 18th, who were facing west. The 18th, with the 82nd on their right, were hotly engaged with the Arabs on the western front, who held stubbornly to the two outlying oases of Mishasta and Saiad ; but the new attack from the south soon required greater attention. While the 52nd bore the brunt of the onslaught, a battalion of the 18th was detached to their support, and after a fierce struggle the Arabs were rolled back by a counter-attack, in which the whole southern front took part. At this juncture the two remaining battalions of the 11th Bersaglieri arrived on the scene, but they were too late to get to grips with the enemy, who were already in retreat.

Meanwhile, the 82nd were undergoing a trying experience. The withdrawal of a battalion of the 18th had weakened the western front, and the Arabs on that side pushed forward on to the positions occupied by the 82nd. For reasons which have not yet been explained, General Salazar, who was with the 84th, had never regained touch with the other half of his brigade, and he had remained more or less inactive since ten o'clock in the morning. As a result, a wide gap was left on the right of the 82nd, and the regiment found itself outflanked by Arabs who had gained the shelter of the oasis. The position became critical. Though fighting stubbornly, the Italians were obliged to fall back, and only the retreat of the Arabs on the southern front saved the 82nd from very heavy loss. As the Arabs on the south retired, those on the west first paused, and then followed the example set them. By four o'clock the Arabs' fury was spent, and they were in

retreat all along the line. The Italians remained on the field until they had thrown up a line of redoubts running from the green dune along the south of the oasis. A sufficient force was left to occupy the newly won positions, and the rest returned to their camps near Sidi Abd-el-Jelil.

When the swift night shut down upon the weary troops, they had been under arms for sixteen hours, of which about eight were passed in hard fighting. The 52nd regiment in particular distinguished itself, and was subsequently awarded the gold medal '*al valor militare*', which had been won by the 11th Bersaglieri at the fight round El Hanni and Sharashat, and by the 84th regiment three days later, at Sidi Messri. The struggle had been long and wearing, but it could not be said that at any time the issue hung in the balance, for the Italians held the upper hand all through. Their steadiness and discipline, but above all their admirable artillery, rendered unavailing the desperate efforts of the Arabs. The artillery did remarkable work, and the unhesitating manner in which the guns were pushed forward, and the dash with which the gunners turned themselves into infantrymen at a critical moment, proved them worthy of their motto : *Ovunque e Sempre*.<sup>1</sup>

The losses on both sides were heavy. The Italians lost ten officers killed and twenty-one wounded, a hundred and five men killed and four hundred and eleven wounded. The Arab loss was much greater, and a few days after the battle it was officially estimated at fourteen hundred killed. A later estimate raises the number to two thousand, but it appears probable that this is an exaggeration. The Italian artillery did terrible execution in some parts of the

<sup>1</sup> The motto—Everywhere and Always—furnishes an interesting parallel to the 'Ubique' of British gunners.

field. In one single fold of ground to the south a hundred and fifty-four bodies were found, all killed by shells ; in a long trench to the west of the oasis over a hundred bodies were found, almost all victims of artillery fire.

This battle was certainly the most important of all those fought in Tripolitania proper. The bulk of the Arabs within reach, from Zavia in the west to Fonduk Ben Gashir in the south, over fourteen thousand in all, took part in the fight. They were stiffened by fifteen hundred Turkish regulars (though it is doubtful whether 'stiffened' is the right word to use), and thanks to the influence of the Turkish officers in command, the Arabs who came from the south did not hasten hot foot to the scene of the fight, and fling themselves in small groups upon the nearest enemy. They attacked in mass, and both upon this side and on the western margin of the oasis the Italians were severely pressed by their fierce onsets. Running low, taking every advantage of the ground, dropping to fire, and then dashing forward again, the attackers quickly got within a short distance of the Italian positions. But the last fatal, fire-swept zone could seldom be crossed, and when they did succeed in getting home, the little grey soldier with the bayonet was more than a match for the desert warrior.

The *terrain* was eminently suited to the Arab tactics. Undulating, broken, seamed with *khors*, and on the western side of the oasis dotted with palm groves, it afforded admirable cover. Long-range rifle-fire was comparatively innocuous. The crests of the dunes could be swept, but not the hollows, or the cracks and gullies that broke up the harder ground. Shrapnel could search the hollows, and did, with devastating effect, but the bravery of the Arabs drove them on under the deadly hail. On no other occasion

during the campaign in Tripolitania proper did the Arabs, taken as a whole, display such reckless courage.<sup>1</sup> There was no Parthian finesse about them in the fight on September 20,<sup>2</sup> and little of the marked preference for sniping over rushing which had generally distinguished them : they seemed determined to get to grips. It follows that the Italians were highly tried during the long hours of the battle, and they came out of the trial with great credit.

In point of fact, the troops which bore the brunt of the fighting were tried more highly than they need have been, owing to a certain want of cohesion and decision in the higher commands. Comment has already been made on the failure of General Salazar's brigade to carry out, in the manner intended, the operations assigned to it. The initial error was made when the 82nd and 84th became detached from one another early in the advance, but the consequences of this mistake might have been repaired if a part of the 84th, after the taking of Sidi Bilal, had carried out the precise orders given before the battle, and advanced along the Wady Hira to the south. Whatever the reasons were which kept General Salazar comparatively idle at Sidi Bilal, they resulted in the 82nd being left, at one time, entirely in the air, exposed to a damaging flank attack in the most difficult country. They were lucky to escape as lightly as they did. Their losses were : two officers and twenty men killed, seven officers and eighty-five men wounded.

From the account of the battle given it will have been

<sup>1</sup> The Ramadan feast was just over, and it was noticed that most of the Arabs, instead of the usual baracan, wore their festal garb—shirt and drawers of white linen, and brightly coloured vest. Perhaps the festival mood was still upon them, urging them to destroy the infidel.

<sup>2</sup> The fight of September 20 is officially known as the battle of Sidi Bilal—a misleading title. But the name Zanzur had already been appropriated for the earlier fight on June 8.

evident that little use was made of the reserves under Generals Maggiotto and Carpeneto. The anticipation had been that these troops would play a part similar to that so successfully carried out by General De Chaurand in the battle of June 8, whereas in fact they scarcely entered into the scene at all. If the attacking Arabs had been taken in the flank as they were in the earlier battle, the strain upon General Tommasoni's brigade would have been greatly relieved, and the Arabs on the west might have been dealt with in a more decisive manner. It would seem that General Ragni was preoccupied with the safety of Tripoli. The Intelligence Department had been insistent that an attack was meditated by the enemy, and General Ragni had had the courage to collect his strength for a decisive blow, instead of distributing it in defensive lines. The defence of Tripoli and the outlying posts, from Tajura and Ain Zara to Fort B., was left to seven weak regular battalions and a battalion of Askaris.

With this preoccupation weighing upon him, it would appear that General Ragni hesitated to employ his reserve too far to the west, preferring to hold it at his disposal in case of an attack upon Tripoli. Eventually, both General Maggiotto's brigade and the Bersaglieri came into action on the Italian left, but this was not until comparatively late in the fight, when General Tommasoni's brigade had already beaten off the enemy. General Ragni was put in an exceedingly difficult position by the insistence of the Intelligence Department. Even while the battle was in progress, it was urged upon him that the situation of Tripoli was critical, that an attack was expected, and that the population was increasingly restive. In the circumstances, it was very difficult for him to fight the battle with his eye solely upon Zanzur, and a hesitation to commit

his reserve too deeply was almost inevitable. While the comparative inaction of the reserve threw a heavier burden upon General De Chaurand's division, the troops took their chance, and came out of the ordeal with flying colours.

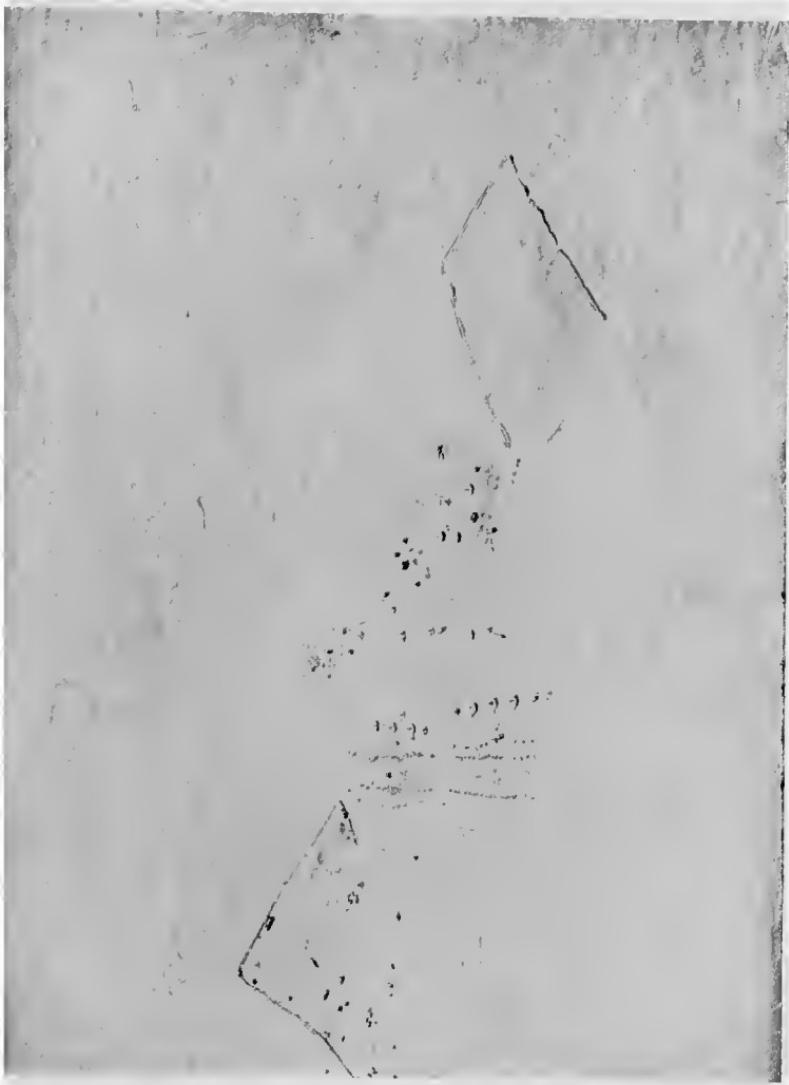
The exaggerated diffidence of the Intelligence Department was typical of their attitude throughout the whole war, subsequent to the revolt in the Tripoli oasis. The reaction from the undue optimism that preceded the revolt was fatally complete, and upon various occasions military action was paralysed or prejudiced by a failure to gauge the true inwardness of alarmist rumours.

In spite of the considerations which hampered General Ragni, the battle of Sidi Bilal was a very important victory, and had a great effect on the situation. Broken, worn-out, and dispirited, the Turco-Arab forces, or at least their main body, did not reach the camps at Suani Beni Adem and Fonduk Ben Gashir till nearly midnight. Neshat Bey had remained at Suani Beni Adem all day, and the sight of his disordered followers streaming into the camp must have been a bitter disappointment. He had struck his last blow, and failed, though it seems that he had the thought of retiring to the mountains, drawing on an Italian advance, and tempting the invaders to an assault upon the steep and rocky approaches to Gharian. Rumour says that he urged retreat upon the lowland sheikhs, but that these refused to withdraw their tribesmen from their own country. Neshat knew that his withdrawal to the mountains would mean the submission of the Urshefana and other tribes, who would make their peace with the Italians as soon as they were relieved of the strong moral pressure exercised by the Turks. These tribesmen had had the fight in the desert that they had asked for ; indeed, they had been given two ; and on each occasion they had been soundly

beaten. The conclusion that began to commend itself to their logical minds was that they should make peace. Faced with this difficulty Neshat seems to have decided that his duty was to remain in the plains.

It was expected at first that the battle of Sidi Bilal would be followed by an early Italian advance, to Suani Beni Adem at least; but the days slipped by without further movement. Peace was obviously about to be concluded, on the terms which Italy thought fit to demand, and though some sections of the European press endeavoured to spur the flagging Turk by *tendancieux* suggestions as to the territorial compromises which Italy would have to concede, the outcome of the deliberations was assured to the Italian Government, and through it to the commander-in-chief in Tripoli. It is generally understood that the information which came to General Ragni regarding the course of the peace negotiations was supplemented by instructions that no further offensive operations should be undertaken, except in the unlooked-for event of continued Turkish reluctance to comply with the Italian demands. A speedy and satisfactory end to hostilities seemed assured, and the situation did not appear to warrant further bloodshed.

All preparations were made for the advance that had been so long anticipated, but it was decreed that its much-discussed difficulties should never be undergone. On October 15 the Italian and Turkish delegates signed the Treaty of Lausanne.



TURKISH CAVALRY LINES AT SUANI BENI ADEM  
Photograph taken from an Airship



## CHAPTER IX

## THE OPERATIONS IN CYRENAICA

FOR two reasons I have thought it necessary to separate any description of the operations in Cyrenaica from the more detailed accounts given of the hostilities in Tripolitania proper. In the first place, the problem which faced the Italian authorities in the eastern province was sharply differentiated from that which presented itself in Tripoli. In the second place, while the operations based upon Tripoli fall naturally into the four distinct phases which have been already indicated, the course of the war in Cyrenaica does not admit of the same clearly marked divisions. While the first phase in each case was naturally identical, the subsequent hostilities in Cyrenaica seem to have followed, roughly speaking, one general course throughout the whole year of the war.

An added reason for separate treatment may be found in the fact that I was not a witness of any of the events which took place in Cyrenaica, and that I have no first-hand knowledge of the local conditions. The brief *résumé* here given is included in this book in order to clear the ground for the general review contained in the chapter following, to indicate more or less adequately the data upon which particular comments are founded.

Some explanation may be necessary of the statement that the problems in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were not of the same nature. The first important difference lies

in the fact that with the occupation of the coast towns in Cyrenaica practically no definite territorial objective, the attainment of which would have a marked effect upon the war, presented itself to the Italians. A possible exception to this general statement might be found in the upland village of Merdj, the site of the ancient Barca, but it can hardly be maintained that this exception is really important, or that the occupation of Merdj would have supplied the Italians with a dominating centre of influence. In Tripolitania, on the other hand, there were various definite centres open to Italian attack. Misurata, Sliten, Zavia, Zuara—all offered a well-defined objective for offensive operations, while the attainment of a secure footing in the Jebel, either at Tarhuna, Gharian, or Kasr Yeffren, would inevitably have exercised a decisive influence upon the attitude of the local Arabs affected, and through them upon many others.

This first difference was emphasised by the second—the widely differing natures of the dwellers in the two provinces. Those observers who are acquainted with both provinces are generally agreed in declaring that the natives of Tripolitania are much more peacefully inclined, much more ready for intercourse with the white man, than the inhabitants of Cyrenaica. Among them the commercial instinct has a stronger influence, and they do not appear to be dominated by the love of fighting for fighting's sake which has proved such an obstacle to the subjugation of primitive Moslem tribesmen in various parts of the world. The inhabitants of Sliten and of the Orfella district have an evil reputation for treachery and brigandage, but they form exceptions to the general rule. In Cyrenaica, on the other hand, the tribesmen are proudly and fiercely independent. The Turks, who occupied and administered, in rough and

ready fashion, the whole of Tripolitania and the Fezzan, and made themselves feared, at least, throughout the extent of their jurisdiction, never proceeded to an effective occupation of the Barca tableland. Turkish kaimakams exercised a nominal sway at Merdj and Ghegab, but the savage and primitive life of the tribesmen suffered little change under this rule, and such allegiance as they felt they owed to any one has been given to the Sheikh-el-Senussi.

With such a population, it is clear that even the seizure of an apparently important strategic point would in fact accomplish little. In Cyrenaica one objective only presented itself to the Italians, the true and final objective of all warfare, the enemy's force.

After the occupation of Benghazi, Derna, and Tobruk, no encounter of any importance took place for more than four weeks. During that time the Italians settled themselves in their bases, received the submission of those chiefs who had remained in Derna and Benghazi, and, it would seem, were waiting for similar acts of submission from the neighbouring tribes. The delay seems scarcely explicable, except upon some such supposition, though the experience of the Arab attack and revolt in Tripoli might have made it clear that a demonstration of strength was the only means to the end desired. The anticipated willingness of the Arab population to throw off the Turkish yoke and acquiesce in an Italian occupation had not been met with in Tripoli, and there was less reason to expect such an attitude on the part of the Cyrenaican tribesmen. Whatever the reason for the delay, it proved very detrimental to the Italian cause. In the interval allowed Enver Bey and other Turkish officers succeeded in making their way to the theatre of war, and the energy and skill of one man, backed by the whole-hearted efforts of a few others, succeeded in

organising a resistance which imposed a baffling check upon Italian arms.

The first sign of a new influence at work upon the Arabs was observable in the middle of November, when attacks were made upon the Italian outposts at Derna, and on the 17th some of the Arabs of the town attempted to raise a revolt. During the following week it was obvious that the enemy were massing in considerable numbers, and on December 24 an Italian reconnaissance in force along the left bank of the Wady Derna was the signal for a fierce attack upon the advancing troops. The broken nature of the ground and the approach of evening threatened disaster to the little column, but the Saluzzo battalion of Alpini succeeded in crossing the deep gorge that forms the bed of the river and extricated their comrades from a very difficult situation. The feat of the Alpini, in descending and climbing the precipitous sides of the gorge, is worthy of special remark.

During the weeks which followed the Italian positions were frequently attacked, but the first engagement of any importance did not take place till December 27. On the morning of that day the aqueduct which brings drinking water into Derna from a natural reservoir nearly two miles away was destroyed by Arabs at the upper end. An Italian force was immediately sent out to cover the work of repairing the damage. The Arabs again attacked fiercely, and a hard struggle ensued. Owing to the nature of the ground, the Italian force was divided into three independent columns, one on the left side of the gorge, one on the right, and one in the gorge itself, to prevent a direct attack upon the engineers. Once again the precipitous sides of the Wady prevented the ready co-operation of the Italian troops, and once again a battalion of Alpini

DERNA—THE "PORT"

*Photo Comerio, Milan*





carried off the honours of the day. The Italian right wing was hard pressed by the enemy, who fought magnificently, and directed their main attack against the mountain battery which had accompanied the column. On several occasions the Arabs got right up to the guns, which were only saved by hard hand-to-hand fighting, and the situation looked bad when the attack threatened to envelop the Italian right. A reserve battalion was sent in with the bayonet and succeeded in hurling the enemy back, but reinforcements arrived, and with indomitable courage the Arabs attacked again. On this occasion an Alpine battalion, sent across from the left, counter-attacked with vigour, and did some excellent work with the bayonet. The fighting was very sharp and three officers of the battalion were killed, but the Arabs were finally routed and did not attack again. They fell slowly back, and the Italians were left in possession of the field. They did not, however, remain in their positions, but fell back upon the outskirts of the town. In retiring, the machine-gun section of the 26th regiment, toiling along a rough and precipitous path, was suddenly attacked by a body of Arabs. Separated from their comrades by the intricacy of the ground, the men deliberately drove the gun-mules over the cliff, and fought their way to the main body of their regiment. Nor was this the only interference with the Italian retreat. The left column, which had not been engaged in the main struggle, was fiercely assailed on its way to the town, and had to win through by means of bayonet charges.

Both sides fought with great determination, and it would seem as though the Arabs had received their fill of battle, for they made no further attack for three weeks, and the interval was employed by the Italians in building out-

lying redoubts, at two miles distance from the town one to the east of the Wady, and two to the west.

Meanwhile, the influences which had collected large numbers of fierce and eager warriors in front of Derna have been at work in the neighbourhood of Benghazi. The terrain is very much less intricate and difficult than at Derna, where the country assumes a mountainous character immediately upon leaving the town. Inland from Benghazi, on the other hand, there is a considerable stretch of plain before the hills of the Barca plateau are reached. For this reason, perhaps, the concentration of Arabs did not so immediately threaten the town as was the case at Derna; it seemed as though the tribesmen preferred to collect in the hills and deliberate their plans fully before making any attack on the invaders. On November 2 a flying column under General Ameglio marched six miles northwards to Koefia and fought a sharp but indecisive action, losing twenty-two killed and fifty wounded.

The tribesmen had been collecting, and they began to deliver tentative attacks upon the Italian lines. The quiet which had characterised the early weeks of the occupation was broken by continual sniping, and by occasional attacks upon the blockhouses which were built to secure the Italian position. No attack in force took place, and only one determined, but unsuccessful, attempt was made to carry an isolated blockhouse by storm. For many weeks the opposing forces lay and watched one another without once coming to grips. It was not until the beginning of March that a real engagement took place.

At Derna, on the other hand, the Turks and Arabs continued to press hard upon the town. A spirited attack was made upon the eastern lines at dawn on January 1<sup>st</sup> but was repulsed after a sharp struggle, while a stron-

force of Turks and Arabs, which had collected on the western side of the wady, withdrew upon the failure of the attack on the other wing.

The work of constructing three main redoubts and generally strengthening the lines went on under difficulties, and on the night of February 11 a determined attack was delivered upon the Italian positions. The initial movements were made against the Italian left, and were repulsed without much difficulty, but the main onslaught came later, and was directed against the centre of the three redoubts, known as the 'Lombardia,' which lies to the west of the Wady Derna and dominates the only reasonably good 'road' to the interior. This advanced redoubt was not yet finished, and it was held by one company of the Edolo battalion of Alpini—one hundred and forty-six men in all.

The Arabs attacked with splendid courage and in overwhelming force, but the Alpini were equal to the occasion. They held the Arabs at bay until supports arrived, losing twenty-three men and exhausting all their ammunition. In the nick of time they were reinforced by two more companies of their regiment, and, after a prolonged struggle in the darkness, the Arabs were driven off.

The fight had extended intermittently along a great part of the Italian line, but the object of the attacking force was evidently to secure the redoubt, and the main Arab force was hurled against this position. All efforts to dislodge the Alpini were useless, but the reckless bravery of the Arabs and the vehemence of their onslaught are sufficiently indicated by the fact that on the following morning one hundred and thirty dead bodies were found within a hundred yards of the fort.

Regular intervals of about three weeks, a little more or a little less, between the various encounters of any importance,

marked the course of hostilities at Derna throughout the whole winter. Harassing skirmishes were of almost daily occurrence, but a rough time-table seems to have governed the plans of the Turco-Arab leaders, perhaps for reasons connected with the supply of ammunition. The interval was kept for the last time between the attack of February 11 and the more important general action which took place on March 3. After this latter date it seems to have been realised by the Turks and Arabs that, in attempting to capture the Italian positions round Derna, they were running their heads against a stone wall.

Early on the morning of March 3 a battalion of the 35th regiment, proceeding more or less casually to occupy the accustomed outposts in front of the 'Lombardia' redoubt, which were only held by day, came under a heavy fire from a strong body of the enemy, who had advanced under cover of darkness and occupied a ridge little more than half a mile from the redoubt. The usual enveloping tactics were pursued by the Arabs, and the Italians ran some risk of being cut off, until three fresh battalions came up in support and pushed the enemy back. But after midday the Turks and Arabs renewed the attack in much greater force (their numbers were estimated at about six thousand), supported by a well-concealed battery. Their continued attempts to outflank the Italian right had led to a considerable extension of the Italian front, which weakened the centre and offered an admirable point of attack. The Turkish leaders were quick to see their opportunity, and, massing a strong force of Arabs, launched an assault upon the central position occupied by a mountain battery. The majority of the gunners were put out of action, only one officer remained unhurt, and the Arabs swarmed triumphantly upon the guns, which were quite insufficiently

defended. A company of the 35th saved the situation, driving the Arabs back at the point of the bayonet, but these rallied and attacked again. A hard struggle ensued, but a company of Alpini came up, and by their help the guns were dragged back into safety.

The Italian line was still hard pressed, and the steady fire of a strong body of Turkish regulars did considerable execution, until a counter-attack by two fresh Italian columns settled the day in favour of the defenders. A mixed column of Alpini and infantry of the line advanced along the main caravan road and drove a wedge into the enemy's position. The Turks and Arabs fell back, but the fight continued to be fiercely contested, until another Italian column was sent forward along the Wady Derna, and a battalion of Alpini who headed the column climbed up out of the ravine and went straight in upon the enemy. The Arabs wavered and broke, but a detachment of Turkish regulars, who occupied a ridge behind the first line, stood firm, till they were swept away by the bayonet rush of the Alpine troops. The whole Turkish line fell back, and though Enver Bey, who was directing the operations in person, made a last attempt to turn the Italian flank, his attack was repulsed, and he himself was wounded, so the report goes, by an Italian shell.

After nine hours' hard fighting the Italians succeeded in occupying the positions from which the enemy had originally advanced, while the retreating Turks and Arabs were quickly lost to sight in the intricate country to the south. At times the struggle had been very fierce, and the gallant onslaughts of the Arabs had been met by a defence, and a subsequent counter-attack, no less gallant. The nature of the ground favoured the Arabs, and the Italians, who fought in the open, were additionally handi-

capped by the Wady Derna and the broken country in their rear, which rendered the arrival of supports, and the general co-operation of the various units in the firing line, matters of considerable difficulty. In all, the Italians opposed something over seven thousand men to the enemy's six thousand, but the wonderful mobility of the Arabs combined with the nature of the ground to counteract the numerical superiority, and it was not until the last hour and a half of the fight that the bulk of the Italian troops came into action, in the final counter-attack. The brunt of the Arab onslaughts was borne by four battalions—two of the 35th, one of the 26th, and an Alpine battalion—supported by the mountain battery which escaped capture so narrowly.

Reviewing the course of the battle it is not easy to understand why the Italian reinforcements were so long delayed. While the four battalions engaged early in the day were driven to extend their firing line and weaken their centre in order to meet the enemy's flanking movement a strong force was available in reserve ; and it was not until their centre had been practically pierced and their guns all but taken that the supporting troops were sent forward. No doubt the nature of the ground, the consequent difficulty of observing the enemy's movements, and the impossibility of bringing troops quickly up to the firing line, were largely responsible for the predicament in which the defenders temporarily found themselves ; but it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that a greater measure of foresight might have been looked for, and that the weakening of the Italian first line ought to have been prevented by the earlier arrival of supporting troops.

During the fight on March 3 the attacking forces lost close upon five hundred killed, and whether from this cause,

or by reason of Enver Bey's disablement, the Derna garrison was left for months unmolested by any serious attack.

The repulse suffered by the Turks and Arabs at Derna was almost immediately followed by a heavier blow on the outskirts of Benghazi. It would seem as though an attack upon the Italian lines had been intended, for large numbers of the enemy had been sighted in the near neighbourhood of the town, and the telephone wires between the outlying redoubts were cut on three successive nights.

At dawn on the morning of March 12 a force of nearly a thousand Arabs was observed coming out of the collection of gardens known to the Italians as the oasis of the Two Palms, which lies less than half a mile to the north-east of the Foyat, the centre of the three redoubts built by the Italians. The Arabs made for the redoubt, in the hope, it is presumed, of taking it by surprise ; for, as soon as the Italians opened fire, they withdrew to the shelter of the oasis. Shortly afterwards large bodies of Turks and Arabs appeared to the south-east, and a Turkish battery opened fire at long range, its shell falling short of the Foyat redoubt. This force was estimated by the Italians at over six thousand, and it looked as though the expected attack were about to develop. For reasons which are not clear, no serious effort was made to drive home an attack on the Italian lines, and after some disjointed firing, and a half-hearted attempt to cut in upon the Italian left, the bulk of the Turks and Arabs withdrew out of range, followed by the fire of a six-inch battery at Berka, which had already silenced the Turkish guns.

The Arabs who had been observed at dawn remained in the oasis of the Two Palms and were joined there by those of the main force who had pushed forward nearest to the Italian lines during the demonstration described above.

No doubt they conceived themselves safe from an attack, and calculated on getting away safely in the darkness, or, possibly, they hoped to use the oasis as a base for a night rush upon the Foyat redoubt. But the opportunity they offered to the Italians was not one which could be let slip. General Briccola quickly organised a column of about four thousand men under General Ameglio, and sent it in against the lurking Arabs, while the supporting artillery—three mountain batteries and two field batteries—rained shrapnel upon the oasis and its approaches on the eastern side. The advance of the column was further supported by heavy fire from the 6-inch battery and the guns of the Foyat redoubt.

As the Italian column deployed for the attack large masses of the enemy were observed beyond the oasis. Presumably they had realised the plight of their comrades, but they were held off by artillery fire, and scarcely entered into the encounter which followed. Another Arab force was seen to the south, advancing towards the oasis, but these were stopped by three squadrons of the Italian cavalry, supported by artillery fire from the 'Roma' redoubt.

The Italian attacking force quickly assumed a crescent-shaped formation and, as it converged upon the oasis, the danger of a cross-fire became apparent. General Ameglio gave the order to charge, and the Italian line swept into the oasis. As they pushed through the gardens, the Arabs retired upon two shallow quarries and made a last stand. Many gave way and fled across the desert towards their main body, pursued by artillery fire, but most of them stood firm until it was too late. Many were bayoneted in a fierce hand-to-hand fight in the quarries, while the others were mowed down by rifle-fire as they attempted to escape. Hardly one of those who faced the final on-



THE FOYAT (OR FUEIHAJ) OASIS, NEAR BENGHAZI

*Photo Conerio, Milan*



slaught got away. They fought desperately, with no thought of surrender, but clubbed rifles and knives were no match for fixed bayonets.

The Italians lost two hundred killed and wounded, including seventeen officers, but during the three days following the fight one thousand and six Arabs were buried.

With this encounter the fighting near Benghazi practically came to an end. The Turks and Arabs remained concentrated in a large camp some eight miles from the town, but made no further attack, while the Italians refrained from any attempt to force a battle. The months dragged on monotonously, varied only by occasional skirmishes between reconnoitring parties, or frequent raids upon the gardens outside the Italian lines. It seemed that in Cyrenaica, as well as in the sister province, the policy of waiting upon events commended itself. The situation at Benghazi, after the thoroughly successful action of the Two Palms, seems to have been more or less on a par with that in Tripoli after the advance upon Ain Zara and the occupation of Gargaresh had driven the enemy from the immediate neighbourhood of the town.

At Derna, on the other hand, even less progress was made. Though the failure of the attack on March 3 kept the enemy comparatively quiet for months, they were never driven so far away as to leave a wide neutral space in the vicinity of the town, and on July 21 the fact was unpleasantly brought home to the garrison and inhabitants. On that day the Turks, besides bombarding the redoubts, threw a few shells into the town, and the performance was repeated daily for eight weeks. Practically no damage was done, but the moral effect of this play at bombardment was deplorable, and it is almost beyond understanding that there seems to have been no serious thought of putting

an end to it until General Trombi was relieved by General Reisoli, who had displayed some vigour in his conduct of the operations round Homs. Perhaps there were reasons, not immediately observable, for the failure to achieve even the minimum of success with which the commanders at Tripoli, Benghazi, and Homs were so long content. The extraordinary difficulty of the country round Derna may have been considered by General Trombi to give sufficient cause for the acceptance of a situation that might well have seemed intolerable, but the rapid and decisive move taken by his successor seems sufficient comment upon his inaction, and sufficient foundation for the criticism here outlined.

The long period of stasis came to an end on September 14, following closely upon a visit made by General Briccola to Derna. It is legitimate to suppose that the recently appointed military governor of Cyrenaica and the new commander at Derna were fully agreed upon the urgent necessity of modifying the attitude of calm acquiescence which had been displayed throughout many months. The Derna garrison, like that of Benghazi, had been weakened in order to assist in the composition of the expeditions to Rhodes and Misurata, but early in September its strength was added to by the arrival of troops who had been engaged elsewhere in the theatre of war: the 43rd regiment from Benghazi, the Mondovi battalion of Alpini, which had seen hard fighting at Homs and formed part of the expedition to Zuara, the 34th regiment, which had also landed at Zuara, the Fenestrelle battalion of Alpini, which had fought in the Tripoli oasis and at Ain Zara, and had taken a brilliant part in the rounding-up the Turks at Psithos in Rhodes, the Askari battalion which had accompanied General Garioni from Bu Kamesch to the oasis of Regdaline.

Major-General Salsa, who had laboured untiringly for nearly ten months as civil commandant of Tripoli, was given the command of a mixed brigade of Alpini and Askaris, and thereby afforded a belated chance of distinguishing himself in the field, a chance which he was not slow to accept.

Before dawn on the morning of September 14 an Italian column left the lines near the 'Lombardia' redoubt and extended over a wide front, while, as the day broke, the guns all along the western segment roared a challenge to the enemy. The troops advanced slowly, and before long they had the satisfaction of seeing long columns of Turks and Arabs concentrating to oppose their advance, which, in fact, was nothing more than a demonstration. For the real business of the day was being effected on the other side of the Wady.

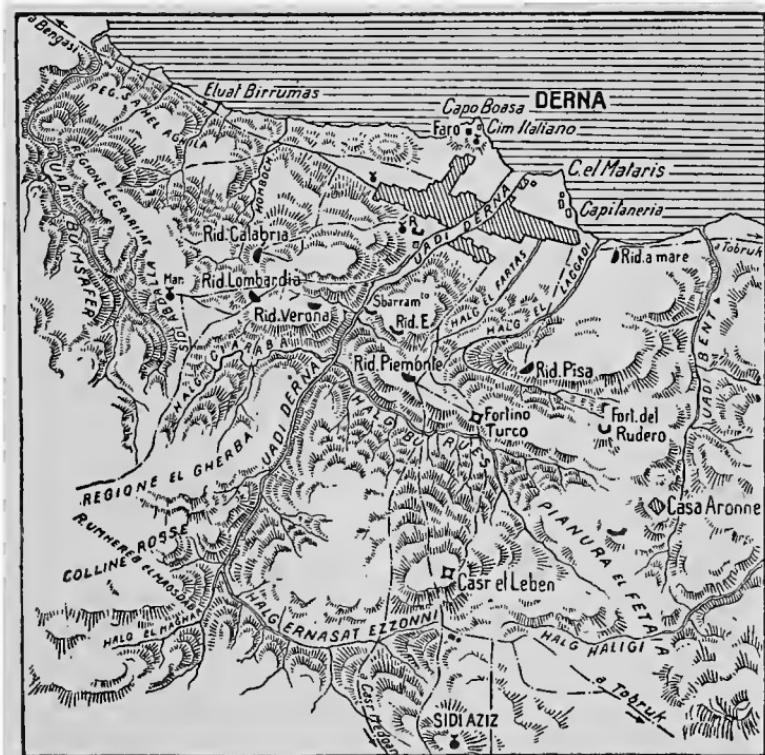
About an hour after the despatch of the western column two columns left the Italian eastern lines. An infantry brigade under General Del Buono debouched from the trenches near the 'Pisa' redoubt and pushed through the broken and difficult ground to Kasr el Leben, while General Salsa's brigade marched along the shore road to the east till it reached the torrent-bed known as Wady Bent. Turning southwards the brigade pressed up the Wady and reached its objective, Casa Aronne, the remnants of a house belonging to an Italian settler, a few minutes before the occupation of Kasr el Leben. The advance had been accomplished without loss, practically without opposition, and the rest of the day was spent in entrenching the positions chosen.

The demonstration on the Italian right had succeeded in containing such Arabs as were in the neighbourhood, but it is probable that the advance took the Turkish leaders

by surprise. After the long months of inaction anything in the nature of an offensive movement must have seemed almost out of the question. They appear to have been caught napping, but they endeavoured to repair their mistake at the earliest opportunity. In all likelihood they were confident that they would be able to retake the positions freshly occupied by the Italians. If we are to put any faith in the stories that came from the Turkish camps, the long inaction of their opponents had inspired them with a profound contempt for the Italian soldier; and a fight more or less in the open must have appeared to hold out a glorious prospect of victory and loot. The Arab of Derna had yet to learn the lesson that was slowly impressed upon his brother of Tripoli—that the Italian soldier can fight in the open when his leaders allow him to do so.

With the first light on the morning of September 17 the Arabs flung themselves upon the Italian outpost lines. The left of the Italian position was held by General Salsa's command—Alpini, Askaris, and native levies from Derna—while the salient angle formed by the junction of the ruin of Kasr el Leben with the old line of redoubts was occupied by General Del Buono's infantry of the line.

The first attack was directed upon General Salsa's right, and the rush of the Arabs was supported by the fire of a Turkish battery. In a few minutes the attack developed all along the line towards the left and, simultaneously, a furious onslaught overwhelmed an outlying detachment on the right of the brigade and burst through the thin lines of the Italians to the rear of their advanced positions. On the extreme left the Arabs advanced with splendid daring, but as they drew near they were staggered by an irresistible counter-attack from a battalion of Alpini and the Eritrean



DERNA AND ENVIRONS



battalion. The Arabs broke and fled, pursued by a steady and pitiless fire, which dropped many of them before they could reach cover. The pressure on his left relieved, General Salsa immediately detached a battalion of Alpini to move against the force of Arabs, some five hundred in number, which had broken through between his brigade and the right wing. General Del Buono launched a similar attack against these Arabs, who were assailing his left, and they were all but exterminated. A few succeeded in escaping from the net which was closing in upon them. Very many were mowed down by rifle-fire as they ran for cover : others were shot, or bayoneted, fighting to the last ; about forty threw down their arms and surrendered.

By nine o'clock in the morning the battle was virtually over, though Turkish guns to the west of the Wady Derna still boomed at intervals, presumably to cover the retreat of their shattered forces. The crackle of musketry sounded at intervals through the day, for Arabs hidden in the folds of the ground still directed a long-range fire against the Italian lines. Towards five o'clock a reconnoitring party of Askaris became the target for a sudden storm of rifle-fire. The Eritrean battalion and the native levies were immediately sent out by General Salsa, and these quick-moving troops succeeded in cutting off the retreat of some three hundred Arabs who had ensconced themselves in caves. A savage struggle ensued, and it is unlikely that any quarter was asked or given. Nearly all the Arabs were killed.

The value of this victory to the Italian cause must have been great. Apparently some four thousand Arabs attacked the Italian left, showing at first all the reckless bravery that had been noticeable in other fights round Derna. During the two days that followed, the Italians buried no less than eleven hundred and thirty-four bodies, and sub-

sequent reconnaissances found a number of others, victims of the pursuing shrapnel. The Italian artillery and machine-guns did terrible execution, and the total Turco-Arab loss in killed alone approached fifteen hundred. Compared with this enormous percentage of killed to those engaged, the official Italian casualty list appears ridiculously small : sixty-one killed, including five officers, and one hundred and thirteen wounded. There is a report that a number of slightly wounded men were not included in the official list. Whether this be so or not, the comparison is sufficiently striking and may perhaps be seized upon by the sceptically inclined. For these it may be well to emphasise two facts : a large number of the Arabs who came so fearlessly to their death were poorly armed and could not hope to inflict much loss ; while, on the other hand, there were many of those entrapped who ceased all attempt at resistance, and were shot down as they vainly tried to escape, like the dervishes at the Atbara. When these two facts are borne in mind, together with the crushing superiority of the Italian artillery and the notorious weakness of the Arab as a marksman, the nature of the two casualty lists becomes readily explicable.

A Turkish account which appeared a few days after the battle is perhaps worth quoting.

'At dawn the Turco-Arabs made an assault upon the Italian left wing, which had recently been extended, broke it, and occupied the centre of the Italian position, which they defended for four hours against the enemy's attacks and artillery fire. Regulars and Arabs pressed on past this point, and at 11 o'clock two regiments took Kasr Harna and fought there till dusk. . . . On the Turkish side one hundred and ten soldiers and two officers were killed and about one hundred and forty wounded.' . . .

'The prisoners [sic] say that an Italian battalion was almost destroyed. . . . About one hundred and fifty rifles were captured. The Italians remain on the defensive.'

This account is fairly typical, except that its claims are more modest than those which were generally advanced after an encounter with the Italians. On the whole, the most interesting thing about it is its source. It came from Vienna, and was published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*—almost the final effort of the financial interests to blind Europe to the actual course of events in Libya. Many journals had long ceased to publish the remarkable versions of certain underground news-factories, but some remained faithful to the last.

The discomfiture of the Turco-Arab forces round Derna was complete. The Italian outpost lines to the east of the Wady Derna were pushed forward nearly two miles, and when an advance was made on the western side, three weeks later, the resistance offered was comparatively weak.

The advance was conducted on a similar plan to that adopted for the operations of September 14. While a column under General Capello pushed straight forward upon the marabout of Sidi Abdallah, occupying both this ridge and the heights to the south-west of the Verona redoubt, a second column under General Salsa marched five miles along the coast and then struck southwards to the ridges above the Wady Bu Msafer. The ground was exceedingly difficult and intricate and the Italians had over a hundred casualties, but the enemy was unable to dispute the advance for long, and a number of prisoners fell into Italian hands—sure sign that the spirit of the Arabs had weakened.

Before the long-drawn-out negotiations for peace were finally concluded the Italians took one more step that has

a special interest. On October 7 a landing was effected at Bomba, without any resistance. Almost exactly a year before, on October 4, 1911, a detachment of sailors had landed at Tobruk, the harbour that is reported to have excited the envious longing of more than one great Power. The explorer Schweinfurth seems to have been mainly responsible for the unique potentialities attributed in some quarters to the possession of Tobruk, and it may be said that in Germany and Italy in particular his glowing accounts were generally believed. Mention has already been made of the haste made by the Italian authorities to occupy Tobruk, a haste which actually compromised, to some extent, the position in the town of Tripoli. All through the winter and all through the burning heat of summer the shadeless, waterless shore was held in force by the Italian garrison, which made no attempt to move from its established base. The hinterland to Tobruk seems to be true desert, and the value of the place to the Italians was simply that of a potential naval base. At Tobruk, if anywhere, the policy of inaction can be readily understood, for in the dreary wastes that lie to the south there was nothing to tempt a force which had secured its objective in taking possession of the harbour.

Tobruk was occupied as a naval base, and it is something of an irony that investigation and reflection should have shown that Bomba seems better suited to the purpose. The realisation of the error is discussed with rather wry smiles in Italy, but there seems no real foundation for blame, or even surprise. What little was known about the coast of Marmarica was the result of comparatively superficial investigation, and a future naval base at Tobruk had formed the subject of many dreams, and some nightmares.

## CHAPTER X

## A GENERAL REVIEW OF THE CAMPAIGN

ATTENTION has already been drawn to the fact that the Italian military authorities, so far from having been in a position to make special preparations against the outbreak of hostilities, were called upon to provide an expeditionary force at a moment when the Army was particularly unready to meet such a demand. The dismissal of the 1889 class of conscripts on September 3, at the close of the grand manœuvres, left only the 1890 class with the colours, and it was not till September 23, when the 1888 class was recalled, that military preparations can be said to have begun. It was two days later that the tone of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Turkey was changed by the vigorous note presented to the Porte by the Italian Embassy in Constantinople, and on the same date secret mobilisation orders were issued; but the political situation developed with such rapidity that the military authorities were hopelessly outdistanced by the diplomatists. The ultimatum was presented a full week before even an advanced detachment of troops could leave Italy, and upon its rejection an awkward problem arose. The Navy did its utmost to bridge over the interval, but the drawbacks of the unavoidable haste with which the crisis was forced on reveal themselves with increased clearness in retrospect.

Tracing things back to their source, it would seem that the military situation was really compromised by one or

other of two expectations, or possibly by the combined influence of both. The appearance of the Italian fleet off Tripoli, nearly a fortnight before the expeditionary force could arrive, must almost certainly have been due to the expectation that the Porte would yield to the ultimatum, or to the belief that a naval demonstration would be sufficient to bluff the Turkish leaders in Tripoli into a surrender. There is a story that the President of the Council, in an interview with Admiral Faravelli, expressed the hope that he would make '*una bella dimostrazione.*' The answer came quick: '*Eccellenza, la guerra non è dimostrazione; è azione.*' The rumour may be only *ben trovato*, but its existence as a story shows the trend of Italian views. The Army and the Navy believed in a war. The politicians and the people were at least inclined to the opinion that a demonstration would suffice.

Perhaps the decision to parade the fleet off Tripoli on September 28 was reinforced by the fear that the safety of the Europeans in the town was at stake. However that may be, the appearance of the fleet, the bombardment, and the landing of the sailors, each step following almost inevitably upon that which preceded, were all in the direct line of responsibility for the protraction of the war beyond the general expectation.

When the summons to surrender the town of Tripoli was met by a refusal, Admiral Faravelli was put in a serious dilemma. To delay offensive action too long in the face of Turkish defiance seemed to threaten a loss of prestige among the Arabs, upon whose support, at this date, considerable reliance was placed. A previous naval demonstration, which came to nothing, had inspired the Arabs with a doubt whether the appearance of Italian warships meant anything at all, and it seemed important that a

belief in the seriousness of Italy's intentions should be impressed at once upon wavering minds. On the other hand it was clear that the action of the fleet could not be followed up quickly by military operations, and the danger of an interval was obvious.

Faced by this difficulty, Admiral Faravelli decided upon a course of action that endeavoured to effect a compromise. He delayed the bombardment as long as he thought possible, and it was with reluctance that he consented to land sailors for the occupation of Tripoli. This step was only taken upon the urgent representations of Dr. Tilger, the German Consul, who feared that with the retreat of the Turkish garrison the town would become a prey to the more unruly elements among the Arab population. It is true that a good deal of loot was carried off from the houses and stores abandoned by the Turks, but it is noteworthy that Dr. Tilger's appeal was made by him on his own responsibility and not as representative of the Consular Corps. There is reason to believe that order might have been quite well preserved by the co-operation of the Consuls and the Arab notables. However, the risk was not one which could be taken in face of Dr. Tilger's request. The bombardment had imposed upon Admiral Faravelli a moral obligation which he could not avoid, and after a day's delay he landed Captain Cagni and his sixteen hundred sailors, to raise the Italian flag and occupy the town. The step was inevitable, but the risk run was great, and its result not favourable to the Italian cause. Not only was the small force of sailors in danger of direct attack from superior numbers ; the weakness of Italy's initial land demonstration had its effect upon both Arab and Turk. The Turks were encouraged to face a situation which seemed all but desperate, and wavering Arabs found in the small

numbers of the landing party and in the failure to undertake an immediate offensive against the Turks, a fresh support for the belief in Italian weakness and poverty which had been fostered alike by Turkish guile and by the flaccidity of Italian diplomacy.

Yet the landing of Captain Cagni's sailors was the lesser of two evils, in spite of its risk, which was justified by success. The moral effect would have been worse, in all probability, if no landing had followed upon the bombardment, and the real mistake, if the word may fairly be used, is to be found farther back in the sequence of events. The first check to the Italian conquest of Tripolitania lay in the withdrawal of the Turks from the town of Tripoli, unmolested by attack or subsequent pursuit. For the Turkish garrison of Tripoli presented itself as the true and essential objective of Italian attack, an objective far more important than the town of Tripoli, and any move which made the attainment of that objective more difficult operated directly against Italian interests. If military action could have followed immediately upon the heels of diplomatic action, if troops could have been landed on the Tripoli coast within twenty-four hours, or even forty-eight, of the declaration of war, there is good reason to believe that Italy might have accomplished that swift and easy occupation of the country upon which many Italians had counted.

The effort of the Navy to bridge the interval could not have succeeded, except upon the supposition that the Turkish authorities in Tripoli could be bluffed into surrender. That bluff was attempted, and failed; and immediately the situation of the Italians became prejudiced. A decision to postpone naval action until the expeditionary force could follow it up might have been produc-

tive of a better result, for a delay in demonstrating Italian intentions too clearly might have retained the Turkish garrison in Tripoli till a force arrived that could strike a decisive blow on land. But the position was one of unusual difficulty, and the conflicting tangle of military and political urgencies is more easily unravelled in retrospect than at the moment when a decision was demanded.

Keeping in mind the prime importance of 'rounding up' the Turkish garrison in Tripoli before it could escape to the interior and form a nucleus of Arab resistance, what alternative presented itself to the naval demonstration off Tripoli, the summons to surrender the town, and the notice of bombardment? The onus is upon the critic to show that a real alternative did exist; otherwise the criticism that Italian action turned out unfortunately is barren of any lesson. The alternative, fully recognised in some quarters, consisted in letting Tripoli town severely alone until the expeditionary force could arrive; in isolating it by declaring a blockade, and by destroying telegraphic communication with Constantinople; in landing troops eventually, not at Tripoli itself, but to the east and west, at Tajura and Zanzur. By the decision to adopt some such programme it is probable that the Turkish troops might have been manœuvred into delaying too long their move into the desert, for it actually required the threat of bombardment, definite orders from Constantinople, and, according to some reports, the entreaties of the German Consul, to bring about the evacuation of Tripoli. Given delay on the part of the Turks, it is conceivable that the march of two converging columns might have combined with naval action to secure at a single blow the fall of Tripoli and the surrender of its garrison.

Report has it that such an alternative did come under

consideration. The political reasons for a demonstration before Tripoli and for the speedy occupation of the town, reinforced by the expectations already indicated, were sufficient to compel the course actually taken ; and at the outbreak of the war it was not clear to any one that so much depended upon an immediate blow being struck at the Turks. As often in the history of military enterprises, political considerations entered so deeply into the problem as to obscure the purely military aspect, and in the circumstances it is hardly surprising that the obvious claims of one alternative should have prevented a recognition of the merits that belonged to the other.

That diplomatic action should outstrip military preparations is common enough in history, though the nations which have succeeded in co-ordinating more closely the work of the diplomatist and the soldier have always been rewarded for the better timing of their efforts. The indication that Italy failed in these preliminary stages is far from being intended as a hostile criticism. From any Englishman such criticism would come very ill, for we seem to make it a point of honour that our military preparations should lag behind our diplomatic pretensions, and in the art of 'muddling through' we have attained a position of lonely pre-eminence. It is not so much as a criticism as an explanation, that the features which marked the first week of the war are discussed in the light of subsequent knowledge.

As far as the situation in Tripoli went, Italy was mainly handicapped by the delay in despatching the expeditionary force, but other handicaps were added to hamper her action in other regions. A consideration for Austrian susceptibilities (perhaps a different phrase should be used) led her to renounce all action on the coasts of Albania and

Epirus, and a similar wish to avoid infringing upon the interests of others prevented the immediate employment of her fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean. Too little recognition has been accorded to Italy's original resolve that the conflict between Turkey and herself should be localised as far as possible in the Tripolitan provinces. The resolve may have been natural ; yet a swift blow in the early days of the war might have saved Italy much loss, in treasure and in precious lives.

In all probability this self-imposed handicap was made heavier than it need have been, for there can have been no obligation upon Italy to refrain from attacking and destroying the Turkish fleet, as it steamed north from Beyrouth. It has not yet been officially explained why Admiral Aubry, who started eastwards on October 1 with the supposed intention of intercepting the Turkish fleet, refrained from carrying out a plan which would have dealt a shrewd blow for Italy. The decision that Tobruk had to be occupied without delay may have partially influenced the Government in diverting Admiral Aubry's squadron from its first objective, but another factor was doubtless at work.

In the early days of the war it seemed likely that Turkey would soon realise her inability to hold the Tripolitan provinces, and would consent to an arrangement which would at once satisfy Italian aspirations and safeguard Turkish dignity. Both Europe and Italy expected some such conclusion to the war—in official circles at least the expectation was common—and it is clear that in the hope of an early and amicable settlement on the lines of a transference of temporal sovereignty Italy would be loth to inflict upon Turkey such a loss and humiliation as the destruction of the Turkish fleet would imply. In some

such expectation, and in the consequent reluctance to strike, is to be found the explanation of the fact that the Turkish fleet was allowed to make its way undisturbed from Beyrout to the Dardanelles, when the superior speed of Admiral Aubry's ships could have intercepted it, and their superior power could have knocked it to pieces.

Owing to the interval which elapsed between the appearance of the Italian fleet off Tripoli and the arrival of the expeditionary force, the Turks were vouchsafed precious time in which to initiate the work of arousing and organising the Arab resistance, a work which they were to perform with astonishing ability and success. The breathing-space that was granted them perforce lengthened out into a fortnight, three weeks, till they had collected and armed, with Mausers from the *Derna*, a considerable following of Arabs, and felt themselves able actually to threaten Tripoli.

The feat performed by the Turkish leaders was a remarkable one, and it was only rendered possible by the assistance of two Tripolitan deputies—Ferhat Bey and Suleiman el Barouni. Ferhat Bey, a native of Zawia, was deputy for Tripoli town, and Suleiman el Barouni, a Berber from Fessato, represented the Jebel district. These two men, each possessed of great influence in his own neighbourhood, were practically responsible for the fact that the Turkish garrison, which had gone out from Tripoli almost in despair, found itself the nucleus of a fast-gathering Arab resistance. Ferhat Bey roused the coast district to the west, and was the first Arab to bring a strong contingent of fighting-men to Azizia, while Suleiman el Barouni called the tribesmen of the Jebel to his side, and was not far behind his fellow-deputy in reinforcing Neshat Bey.

All this took time, and it can be seen now that if the Italians could have made a push for Azizia within a week

of landing, the growth of an Arab resistance would have been nipped in the bud, and the tribesmen of the plains, at least, would have made an immediate peace with the invaders. Their inclinations lay this way, but the exhortations of Ferhat Bey, the inaction of the Italians and the long prestige of the Turk combined to overcome their inclinations and range them against the invaders. A quick advance upon Azizia, an endeavour to break up the Turkish nucleus, would have cut clean across this resistance, and even if the Turks had carried out their original plan of retiring upon Gharian before the Italian advance, it is almost certain that the occupation of Azizia would have detached the coast tribes, or a large proportion of them, from the Turkish cause. The distance to Azizia is so short—about thirty miles—that there might seem to have been no question of cutting loose from the base at Tripoli. But thirty miles in the country south of Tripoli is a sufficiently formidable distance ; and the belief that the Turks would never retreat towards the interior had limited the transport organisation to what was required for a two days' march only. There were many circumstances to hinder rapid action, and there must always rest upon the critic the obligation to bear in mind that what seems clear in the light of subsequent knowledge may have been obscure enough at the time.

There has been far too much hasty criticism of the Italian failure to initiate immediate offensive action against the Turkish troops. Some writers have gone so far as to ask why the Turks were allowed to get away from the town of Tripoli at all. It is a pertinent question, and the real answer to it has been already outlined. But the real answer is obviously no reflection upon Italian military capacity ; and it is this capacity which is sometimes de-

nounced in unmeasured terms, not by soldiers but by journalists. The important point for a critic to bear in mind is: What was the earliest moment at which the offensive might have been taken? It is idle to suggest that the Turks ought to have been pursued and destroyed during the first week of the occupation. Captain Cagni and his sailors had enough to do without adventuring forth into the desert in search of the Turkish garrison. Nor could a move forward follow immediately upon the arrival of the expeditionary force. Although the infantry had all been disembarked by the evening of October 12, rough weather interfered with the landing of stores, guns, carts, horses, and mules. For three days little could be done, and though the guns and the cavalry, together with a great proportion of the stores and material, were disembarked on October 15 and 16, the landing operations were not finally completed until four days later.

Conceivably, if the vital necessity for haste had been realised, General Caneva might have been able to send out a scratch column of four or five thousand men by October 20. The word 'scratch' is used advisedly, for the composite battalions had not yet shaken together, and no transport suitable for the country was available. The mule-drawn Sicilian and Alpine carts might have served at a pinch, but a mule is the last animal to rely upon in a country where water is scarce. To collect camels and camel-drivers required time, and the wretched animals which remained in Tripoli were, in fact, fit for very little. Two or three days earlier it might have been possible to launch a flying column at Azizia, a column marching with three days' rations, and no other impedimenta save ammunition. Is it suggested by Italy's critics that either of these steps ought to have been taken? Even the light of sub-

sequent knowledge makes it clear that no move was possible till it was too late to secure the object for which a move was desirable. A column leaving Tripoli on October 20 would not have reached Azizia until after the tribesmen of Ferhat Bey and Suleiman el Barouni had joined forces with the Turks. The despatch of a column at an earlier date would hardly, in the circumstances, have been considered by any soldier.

The circumstances, perhaps, need explanation. When General Caneva arrived in Tripoli, all his information was to the effect that the Arab community welcomed the Italian occupation. This was the general belief in Italy, in official quarters, a belief founded upon assurances from Tripoli. As far as the Tripoli notables went the information was roughly correct, though perhaps the warmth of pro-Italian feeling was exaggerated. But what was true of the Tripoli chiefs was not true of the sheikhs and other leaders in the country districts. Certainly, the Arab had no particular love for the Turk, in any part of Tripolandia ; but the antipathy for the Turk whom he knew did not at all imply a sympathy for the Italian, whom he did not know. The Tripoli chiefs who were anxious for an Italian occupation erred, knowingly or unknowingly, in reporting that a similar anxiety existed elsewhere. And the error led the Italians to the belief that the Turks would remain isolated in the desert.

It follows that General Caneva believed he had plenty of time. He set about securing his base, confident, it would seem, that the Turks could be tackled at leisure. The disastrous awakening came on October 23, when the main attack on the Italian lines was conducted for the most part by Arabs, and the rising in the oasis showed that even in the precincts of Tripoli itself the pro-Italian feeling

was unstable and untrustworthy. Undoubtedly the confidence displayed by the Italians during those early days amounted to carelessness, and it is not possible to acquit those in authority of blame for the critical situation that arose. True, they were the victims of a deficient intelligence department, but even admitting that the situation was thoroughly misunderstood and thereby prejudiced, there is some reason to believe that the vigilant eye and the suspicious mind, which should distinguish those in charge of a military expedition in a strange country, were unfortunately lacking in Tripoli. General Caneva was a prey to cruel luck, in that he was suddenly confronted with a situation very different from what he had been led to expect, but he does seem to have laid himself open to the charge of failing in strict military precaution.

The reaction which followed upon the discovery of the initial error was unhappily complete. If the Italian attitude had been characterised at first by over-confidence, it was now marked by over-diffidence, and by a tendency to exaggerate difficulties which persisted for many months. Little criticism can with justice be directed against the conduct of the operations during November, though perhaps a speeding-up process might have been applied with advantage. It is fairly clear that to move out in force before the cholera epidemic had been gripped and checked, was almost out of the question. When the death-roll among the troops went up to a hundred a day and the fear of a devastating increase weighed on the mind, it was hardly the moment to choose for offensive action. From day to day it was uncertain how many troops could be counted upon, until the admirable work of the doctors met with its reward. It was not until after the middle of the month that the authorities could breathe freely, and a move

forward was made on November 26, to be followed eight days later by the advance upon Ain Zara.

These operations have both been described in detail, and it is unnecessary to add to the comments already made. There followed the period which was understood to be one of preparation for a decisive move, a period marked by great activity in the town of Tripoli, and by the actions at Bir Tobras and Gargaresh. The attitude of diffidence became increasingly evident. Some of General Frugoni's comments on the Bir Tobras action, and his surprising order to evacuate Gargaresh, sufficiently indicate the line of thought pursued. But at this date there was little expectation that the period of absolute inaction would be so greatly prolonged.

Reviewing as a whole the course of the military operations in 1912, the failure to initiate any real offensive in Tripolitania for more than three months seems almost more inexplicable now than it appeared at the beginning of April, when the period of inaction came to an end. During those months when the war languished, many Italians began to ask themselves whether the decree of annexation which had been promulgated at the beginning of November had not in fact been an error in policy, whether the step which all had welcomed had not put an insuperable obstacle in the way of Turkey's expected acquiescence in the loss of the Tripolitan provinces. It is to the credit of Italians that these questionings were scarcely echoed in the press, and did not give rise to party criticisms. But they were widespread and persistent.

There can be little doubt that the decree of annexation did put a stop to negotiations which were suggesting themselves at the end of October, and the Italian Government has been the target for a good deal of foreign criticism based

on this fact. Yet there was one compelling argument in favour of the formal annexation which should give pause to those who question its wisdom. A war with Turkey necessarily involves many interests besides those of the belligerent nations, and sooner or later the neutral Powers come into play, with a hint, a protest, an offer of mediation, and finally, perhaps with the suggestion of a conference. The decree of annexation put out of court any pressure upon Italy to accept a solution which should be based on a compromise regarding the question of sovereignty. For the necessity of maintaining European prestige imposed upon the Powers the recognition that the declaration of Italian sovereignty was irrevocable. No doubt Italy lengthened the war by proclaiming a formal annexation of the two Turkish provinces, but she rid herself once for all of the danger she naturally feared—the danger of an interference in the direction of an unsatisfactory solution. The decree of annexation increased her military difficulties, but it must have cleared the political atmosphere.

Looked at all round, the policy of annexation seems not only defensible, but thoroughly sound. On the other hand, the decree could only be fully justified if it were followed by vigorous military action, and the neglect to fulfil this requirement gave double cause for criticism. Perhaps at some future date an Italian historian will be able to explain the apparent paralysis of Italian arms during three months. Meanwhile, the Government preserves an impenetrable silence on the point which is a puzzle throughout the length and breadth of Italy. People are still asking themselves the questions they asked last spring : Whether it was really necessary to refrain from any offensive movement against the enemy ? Whether it was true that there was no objective for an advance into the desert ?

In spite of official silence Italian opinion is more or less agreed as to the reasons which influenced the authorities in declaring against an advance to the Jebel. The plan which commended itself was based upon one root idea—that Italian arms must suffer no reverse, not even a slight check. Nothing was to be done until it could be done perfectly, with every contingency provided for, and all risk minimised.

Putting two and two together, there is justification for the conclusion that General Caneva's visit to Rome in February marked the final abandonment of the bolder policy, and the definite adoption of what came to be known as the *programma minimo*. If rumour is correct, we may take it that General Caneva succeeded in proving to the War Office and to the Government that the projected advance to the Jebel did certainly involve great difficulties and a certain risk. He could not guarantee bloodless victories, or the immediate overthrow of the Turco-Arab combination ; he could not promise, nor could any man, that Italian arms would receive no check, that Italian soldiers would not be sacrificed. The problem was intrinsically difficult enough ; hampered by the conditions which are reported to have been imposed, it became all but insoluble.

In all probability, the decisive argument in favour of the *programma minimo* was founded on the conviction that the war would come to its inevitable end whether a desert campaign was undertaken or not ; that on this account it was better to run no risks, but to wait upon the natural course of events. The belief that delay would wear out resistance had a certain foundation, but the whole argument, as at first applied, left out of account the vital question of prestige, and the absolute necessity of impressing the Arab with an assurance of Italian strength.

Reduced to its essential terms, the problem before the military authorities may be stated as follows : how to convince the Arabs, at the lowest cost, that resistance was futile ? While a desert campaign was certainly feasible, and might have brought the war to a speedy conclusion, it was clear that more cautious methods would bring about a successful result, though at a later date. It follows, therefore, that criticism should be directed less against the adoption of the *programma minimo* than against the lack of vigour displayed in carrying it out. Considering all the circumstances, the difficulties of an advance to the Jebel, particularly of the later stages, may be said to have imposed a legitimate hesitation upon a commander who was apparently hampered by orders not to risk a check. But it is difficult to believe that the only alternative to such an advance lay in the policy of masterly inactivity which immobilised a large, keen, and efficient army for a period of nearly five months, from the occupation of Gargaresh till the battle of Sidi Abd-el-Jelil. Remembering that the objective of warfare is the break-up or destruction of the enemy's power, and considering the relative strength of the adversaries, it would seem as though it had been to Italy's advantage to force an action wherever a favourable opportunity offered. While it is easy to understand a reluctance to undertake a difficult and conceivably unessential advance, it is not easy to appreciate an apparent determination to do nothing.

The renewal of military operations which was initiated with the landing at Ras Makabes, and continued all through the summer, serves to emphasise more strongly the inaction which preceded, and the value of a successful engagement in the open was clearly indicated by the battle at Sidi Abd-el-Jelil. Although the results were not immedi-

ately visible, it is permissible to assume that the successful issue of this fight, and the heavier blow which was dealt three months later, were directly responsible for the fact that when hostilities ceased between Italy and Turkey, the Italians were able to proceed to a peaceful occupation of the country. By the end of the year practically the whole of the lowland district between the Jebel and the sea, from Misurata to the Tunis border, and the Jebel itself from Homs to beyond Gharian, were effectively occupied by Italian garrisons. By that date residents had already been appointed at the chief centres, and although Suleiman el Barouni still held aloof with a large following, the extension of satisfactory relations was proceeding. Sheikhs from the farther upland villages came down to Tripoli to view the wonders of the transformed town and make submission to a Government that promised increase of prosperity.

In Cyrenaica, on the other hand, the situation remained practically unchanged by the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne, and at the end of the year the two provinces presented a marked contrast. No step forward had been taken by the Italians, and shots were still exchanged at times, in the near neighbourhood of Derna and Benghazi, between Arab and Italian patrols. Despite the departure of Enver Bey the obstinate hostility of the Arabs persisted, and the Turkish troops in the country, commanded by Aziz Bey, an Egyptian by birth, showed few signs of carrying out the rôle assigned to them by the terms of peace. The peculiar situation could not but give rise to comment in Italy, and various theories have been advanced to account for the practical deadlock which still existed two and a half months after the cessation of formal warfare. A few hot-heads have gone so far as to attribute the persistently hostile attitude of the Arabs to underground intrigues,

intrigues in which Enver Bey, the Sheikh-el-Senussi, and the Anglo-Egyptian Government were darkly involved. That a suspicion of Great Britain should be nourished in some Italian minds need cause no surprise. The unfriendly attitude of a large section of the British press towards the Tripoli enterprise, and the virulent hostility of certain newspapers, came as an almost stupefying surprise to Italian opinion. The surprise prompted a search for explanations, and in some quarters these are supposed to consist in the ambition of Great Britain to extend the boundaries of Egypt.

Generally speaking, however, it is recognised that the Cyrenaican difficulty does not demand any such far-fetched excuse. The situation can be satisfactorily accounted for by perfectly obvious facts : by the fierce and independent character of the nomad tribesmen ; by the gospel of resistance preached by Enver Bey, and the remarkable work of organisation effected by him and by other Turkish officers ; and, above all, by the fact that in Cyrenaica Italian arms had not succeeded in impressing the Arabs with a proper conviction of Italy's strength.

There is a strong tendency in the Italian press to exalt the work done by General Briccola in Cyrenaica above that accomplished by General Caneva in Tripolitania. It has been said frequently, and it continues to be said, that while General Caneva was holding his troops idle in Tripoli General Briccola fought and won the victory of the Two Palms, and flung back the enemy from the near neighbourhood of Benghazi, inflicting a blow which prevented further Arab aggression. The comparison, or rather the way of stating it, seems to do General Caneva a great injustice. The battle of the Two Palms did for Benghazi what the battle of Ain Zara did for Tripoli three months earlier.

It is true that the Arab death-roll was far heavier in the later battle, but as far as can be judged this fact was due to the good fortune which led the Arabs to remain in the oasis of the Two Palms, and to the superiority of General Ameglio over General Pecori Giraldi as a leader in the field, particularly in the matter of quick and decisive movement. If General Caneva remained practically inactive for months after the battle of Ain Zara, General Briccola made no forward move whatever after the battle of the Two Palms. General Caneva only adopted a more vigorous offensive when he found that the policy of waiting upon events led to no result ; but the operations of the summer are sufficient answer to those who contrast his methods unfavourably with those of General Briccola. These operations throw into bolder relief the inaction of the spring, and are indeed the condemnation of that inaction : but, on the other hand, they refute those criticisms of General Caneva which are supported by the suggestion that greater vigour was shown by his subordinate in Cyrenaica.

The battle of the Two Palms acquired a fictitious importance in Italian opinion from the fact that it took place at a time when the inaction in Tripolitania was beginning to make people restive. The dash shown by General Ameglio and his troops, and the heavy loss sustained by the Arabs, veiled the fact that the actual situation in the neighbourhood of Benghazi was not more altered by the fight than the situation round Tripoli was altered by the advance upon Ain Zara. In point of fact the Ain Zara action pushed the enemy farther back, and resulted in a considerably greater extension of the Italian lines.

It has already been explained that General Briccola's task was harder than General Caneva's ; but a review of the work attempted hardly leads to the conclusion that the

problem was tackled with greater vigour. The situation in Cyrenaica subsequent to the conclusion of peace may be only partially accounted for by the more intractable nature of the tribesmen. Two hot encounters in the open, like those of Zanzur and Sidi Bilal (not to speak of the successful advance of General Garioni's division), would have gone far to thaw the obstinate resolve of the Cyrenaican Arabs, and might have induced the Turks to a more speedy compliance with the clause in the Treaty of Lausanne which provided for their departure. As matters stand, it is not improbable that the omission to take a vigorous offensive will have to be repaired before satisfactory relations are established ;<sup>1</sup> and even if the departure of the Turks results in a nominal acquiescence in Italian rule, the task of penetration and administration is likely to be rendered much more difficult by the failure to impose a due regard for Italian prestige.

In criticising the conduct of the campaign it is essential to give due regard to the restrictions which are commonly held to have been imposed by the Government—the restrictions as to loss of life and ordinary risks. Answering some tentative suggestions as to possible remissness on the part of the officers in command, Signor Giolitti declared that in the case of a war where, throughout a whole year, no single failure great or small had to be recorded, the conduct of the generals in charge could hardly be a matter for question. In the first place the assumption is too broad. The action at Bir Tobras was not an Italian success, and on one or two other occasions, notably at Derna, Italian arms came very close to what may reason-

<sup>1</sup> Sheikhs favourable to the Italian occupation have recently urged the despatch of a column to the uplands as the necessary preliminary to a general acceptance of Italian rule.

ably be termed failure. In the second place, the conclusion drawn will not bear investigation. The determination to avoid the risk of failure by inaction instead of minimising it by preparation and skill brings about a state of things that is not war, and to that state the hostilities in Tripolitania were at one time nearly reduced. The attitude of mind which takes for its watchword 'No checks, however slight,' is apt to result in the deadlock pictured by the classic lines :

'There was an old man of Hong Kong,  
Who never did anything wrong.  
    He lay on his back  
    With his head in a sack,  
That innocuous old man of Hong Kong.'

It is improbable that the line of argument adopted by the President of the Council would be endorsed by soldiers in Italy, or on the spot in Tripoli. Military opinion chafed under the restrictions which are believed to have been imposed for political reasons, and the fact remains that the impossibility of bringing the war to an end by purely defensive methods was finally recognised. No one in Italy desired a display of energy for energy's sake, and rashness would rightly have been deprecated ; but Italian opinion did realise that in order to make omelettes it is necessary to break eggs, while for a considerable time the authorities appeared to be searching for a substitute.

Yet the authorities had excuse for caution, even for the excessive caution that persisted so long. The policy which determined the conduct of operations in Libya was developed under the shadow of an unhappy memory—the memory of the Abyssinian campaign, the disaster at Adowa, and the refusal of the Italian people to tolerate further sacrifice. The idea of no checks and no reverses has an authentic

pedigree, that is clear for all the world to read. But the offspring is surely late-born, unfitted to the altered times.

The attitude of the Italian people throughout the long year of the war has called forth admiration and surprise from all who were in touch with Italian feeling. Surprise as well as admiration ; for even among those who knew Italy best there were not many who had realised to the full the growth of the national spirit. Nor was the surprise confined to foreigners ; Italy astonished even Italians. In November 1911, when it was already apparent that the war would be no affair of a few weeks, but a protracted struggle involving unlooked-for difficulties, there was a good deal of misgiving as to the attitude of 'the people.' The tide of enthusiasm still ran strongly, and Italian feeling seemed almost solid in favour of the war ; but in private heads were shaken, and there was much talk of 'the inevitable reaction.' The reaction, in the sense that was feared, never came. The exultant enthusiasm of the first few weeks did die down, but in its place there became evident a far finer national feeling, the feeling of firm resolve that was ready to face long months of inconclusive warfare, to bear the pressure of straitened circumstances and the loss of precious lives, to the end that the enterprise upon which the nation had embarked should be brought to a fitting and honourable completion.

Among all classes a practical unanimity prevailed, and the Socialist party, which began by declaring against the war, found itself obliged to desist from a campaign which met with no response in the country, and even threatened disaster to the party. Selfish reasons may have had something to do with the quiescent behaviour of a party whose principles were outraged by the war, but it is a notable and a creditable fact that a number of those who were avowedly

opposed to the Tripoli enterprise, and might well have used the episode of the Arab revolt and the slow progress of Italian arms to stir up feeling against the Government, deliberately refrained from doing anything to embarrass the conduct of hostilities and prejudice the position of their country. It will be to the lasting credit of Italy and her sons that in her hour of difficulty there were none who strove to add to her burden, and none to cast a slur upon those who were fighting and dying on her behalf. There was not a single politician of note or of promise who played for the reaction that might come when the war was over, when the bill, with its costly items of blood and treasure, should be presented to the people. Blinded by patriotism to the chances of future gain, to the promptings of ambition and the claims of self-interest, their one aim seemed to be to strengthen the hands of those who had charge of the national honour.

The Socialists refrained from attack, the Opposition forgot that its duty was to oppose, and Italy presented an unbroken front to the world. The astonishing spectacle was seen of a Parliament which gave to the past acts and new demands of the Government an approval that was unanimous, save for the academic vote recorded by a minority of the Socialist party. The solid support accorded was all the more remarkable inasmuch as it was realised in many quarters that the Government's management of the war and the negotiations which led up to it gave ample grounds for criticism. But the accents of criticism were all but hushed in face of the conviction that unity of speech and unity of action were demanded by the national interest. Only now, when the war has been steered to a successful conclusion, are there signs of a desire that the Government should give an account of its stewardship, should explain

and defend those items in the conduct of the war which are well known to have afforded ground for question.

Among the feelings which prompts such a desire is the conviction that insufficient use was made of the national enthusiasm for the war, that distrust of the people was carried too far, and that the Government failed to realise that the Italy which acclaimed the Tripoli enterprise was altogether different from the Italy which suspected, and finally cut short, the Abyssinian adventure. On the other hand, there is a widespread recognition that if the Government did not take sufficient advantage of the new national spirit, it was because they dared not risk success upon an untested support. That they and the generals who carried out their policy erred on the side of caution is practically beyond dispute, but excuse may readily be found for the failure to gauge the development of the national spirit.

It has been asked with some frequency why the popular support which was withheld from Italy's previous colonial enterprise was accorded in such full measure to the occupation of the Tripolitan provinces. A common answer has been that Tripoli is close to Sicily, that its shores are washed by the sea that some Italians call 'mare nostrum,' that Italian experience of Tunis has made the North African littoral familiar in its essentials to the people of Italy. These factors have had their weight, but the real answer lies elsewhere—in the fact that Italy is no longer living on the memory of a great past, or struggling in the thrall of an unprosperous present. The recollection of past glories and the assurance of present well-being have combined to make Italians look to the building up of a great future; the true secret of the national attitude may not be found in the alteration of mere circumstance, but in the growth of a people.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE ITALIAN ARMY AT WORK

ANY attempt to judge the work of an army engaged in actual warfare must still begin with an estimate of the men who compose it. While the conditions of war have been immensely changed by the development of modern armaments, the growth in the size of armies, and the resulting alterations in tactics, in the ultimate resort success does still depend upon the military qualities of 'the common soldier.' War has become immensely more difficult for the general, and to that extent brain-power is more than ever requisite for the successful conduct of a campaign, but the demand upon the physical and moral qualities of troops has increased in a corresponding degree. The improvement in *materiel* has not lessened the relative value of men ; assuming a reasonable equality of armament, the man behind the gun or the rifle, the man who wields the sabre or the bayonet, remains the decisive factor.

In the Tripoli campaign the disparity of armament has been too great to allow of an absolute verdict as to the possibilities of the Italian soldier under the conditions of modern warfare. The Italian infantryman has generally been able to fight under the protecting fire of his own artillery against an enemy whose guns were very few and badly served, or who even lacked artillery altogether ; the Italian gunner has been able to do his work undisturbed by a return hail of shrapnel. On the other hand, there

have been occasions when the nature of the terrain has helped to neutralise this inequality (the fights in the oasis of Tripoli are cases in point); and, generally speaking, colonial wars, against a savage enemy, impose a special strain that is lacking in hostilities between civilised opponents. In any case, the Tripoli campaign has afforded the observer numerous opportunities of gauging the qualities of the Italian soldier, and of deducing therefrom his value under different conditions. An attempt to estimate these qualities, by one who was in daily touch with the Italian troops for nineteen weeks, may conceivably have a value; the more so as many hasty criticisms have been passed upon the Italian soldier by writers whose acquaintance with him is of the slightest, by correspondents who have never seen him under fire, by critics of his mentality who could not even speak to him in his own language.

When I landed in Tripoli the town and the neighbourhood had not yet recovered from the effects of the inundation which took place on November 17. Some roads were still impassable, the palm-gardens behind the trenches were still dotted with picturesque lakes and pools; and it was easy to imagine what the condition of things had been. But the soldier in the trenches, so recently 'drowned out,' seemed perfectly cheerful.

During the days that followed I spent much time in the Italian lines, and I found always the same keen spirit. I talked with men who had been leading for five or six weeks the monotonous but nervous life of the trenches—monotonous, because each day passed like another, without diversion, almost without news; nervous, because at any moment of the day or night the crackle of musketry among the palms might call the men to attention, sometimes to repel a brisk attack, oftener merely to watch for an invisible



GRENADIERS NEAR EL HANNI



BERSAGLIERI AT EL HANNI



enemy, who sniped from the shelter of trees and wells. The only breaks in the routine were the occasional limited reconnaissances on the eastern front, when detachments of a company, or two companies, left the shelter of the trenches to patrol the labyrinth of the oasis, with strict orders not to allow themselves to be drawn into an engagement. The strain must have been considerable, but the spirit of the men was always the same. Sometimes they wondered a little when the advance would begin : they were eager to get to grips with the enemy who bothered them night and day, but they showed no trace at all of the despondency and lack of nerve which had been so freely attributed to them by certain writers in the press.

They were always cheerful ; but, after all, cheerfulness is an attribute of the Italian people, and it is not surprising that a national characteristic should be evident among the soldiers. What impressed me more forcibly was the coolness and balance displayed by the troops, both in the trenches and in the desert. Memory recalls one instance, when an attack developed upon the eastern lines in the oasis. The trenches had been freshly thrown up, and there had not yet been time to clear the ground in front of them. For fifty yards the ground was dotted with fruit-trees ; beyond that a mud wall ran roughly parallel with the trenches ; beyond that again the vegetation of the oasis seemed to merge into an impenetrable screen of cover. Hardly an enemy could be seen, only the occasional glimpse of a baracan ; but bullets sang and droned overhead, or thudded against the sand-bags that crowned the trenches. The Arab fire became heavier, and the Italians, who had displayed a phlegmatic calm to begin with, grew keen. They had learned to ignore sniping, but something better seemed to promise. Their return fire was well controlled,

and at first only the picked shots (*tiratori scelti*) responded to the enemy's hail of bullets. The others waited quietly, without fidgeting, though keenness showed in their look, till a word brought them to their places, and a continuous, withering fire soon checked and silenced the advancing enemy. It was an ugly place to defend, and once or twice the Arabs did gather for a rush ; for this was before they had really had a taste of the Italian bayonet, when the experiences of October 23 and the memory of two companies of Bersaglieri cut to pieces still inspired confidence. The Italian fire was too hot, and the attack was never pressed home, but during the minutes of expectation, under a heavy fire, the young soldiers in the trenches were perfectly cool and steady. An observer could not have been otherwise than favourably impressed.

In the desert their behaviour was not less satisfactory. Though they were tried by the extreme deliberation of movement insisted upon by their leaders, they advanced as though they were on manœuvres. During this earlier part of the war, anything in the nature of 'dash' was rather disconcerted by those in authority, and it was only in the later conflicts, generally speaking, that spectators had a chance of witnessing an exhibition of the quality which we are apt specially to associate with a southern race.

Over and over again it was the steadiness and calmness of the men that fixed itself in my memory, and one instance in particular remains vividly impressed. I refer to the ghastly scene near El Hanni, where the bodies of some fifty tortured and mutilated Bersaglieri were discovered. I took special notice of the demeanour of the many soldiers present on that occasion, and I have to confess myself surprised by their controlled and dignified behaviour. The things seen then were enough to try the calmness of any

spectator, and it would not have been a matter for wonder if the soldiery of a Latin race had lost hold of their control and given vent to the feelings of horror and rage that possessed all who looked on. There was no doubt what these men were feeling, what any soldiery, any men, would have felt in the circumstances, but they were perfectly quiet. No loud imprecations, none of the wild gestures which we associate with what some people call 'a typical Italian,' no display of 'nerves.'

It seems advisable to insist upon these qualities of steadiness and control in view of the charges against the Italian soldier which have proceeded from certain quarters, charges which have made him out to be a constant prey to hysteria and 'funk.' These charges constitute a most shameful libel, and it is only by remembering that it is the habit of a certain type of journalism, all over Europe, to indulge in this kind of slander, that one can arrive at a just appreciation of the writings which are foisted upon the public as genuine criticism. People in England have forgotten, perhaps, the accusations of nervousness and cowardice which have been levelled at our own men by certain Continental journals. If they had remembered these, they might have been less inclined to swallow some of the grosser lies told about the Italians. The very same stories were spread over Europe about the Italian troops that were told of our men during the Boer War: how they were dragged unwillingly on board the transports, and would only fight under the threat of their officers' revolvers. The same lie crops up every time, and there is always a public to accept it. One may presume that the press finds it a sure draw.

A tribute paid to the military qualities of the Italian soldier by the well-known war correspondent of the *Times*,

Major Lionel James, has been quoted in an earlier chapter. Mr. Bennet Burleigh, whose lengthy experience of many wars and many armies entitles him to a special hearing, has borne similar testimony. In the circumstances, it is more than legitimate to protest against the extraordinary charges made by some writers who were not in a position to form a judgment.

Obviously no one will pretend that the behaviour of the Italian troops has been uniformly faultless. That cannot be maintained of any nation, in any war. There come times when the best troops give way under a stress that in normal circumstances they would readily support. They break and fall into confusion, even run away, or they lie under cover and refuse to advance. These instances simply illustrate the difficult psychology of war. Why a body of men suddenly fails to do what it has done before, and will do again, may not be readily understood. That such failure forms a part of the ordinary experience of war will scarcely be gainsaid by any soldier, or by any student of military history.

The Italians furnish instances in point, as all other nations have done. During the encounter at Bir Tobras a battalion of Bersaglieri, floundering in the deep sand of the dunes, got altogether out of hand. Order was lost ; the men broke up into small groups ; and while some attempted an independent fight of their own, a few tried to take the shortest way to Ain Zara. There was wild confusion, and for some minutes the situation was critical in the extreme. But the men rallied, and came again, thanks to the efforts of their officers, and particularly to the personal influence of their colonel. Riding among the straggling, wavering groups, Colonel Fara called to his men : '*A me, Bersaglieri.*' They answered his appeal, and the

danger passed. Throughout the trying hours which followed, with both machine-guns and many rifles jammed by the sand, with a dwindling store of ammunition that at length gave out altogether, the men stood steady. They waited in the darkness, bayonets fixed, for the last attack that for some reason or other was never pressed home ;<sup>1</sup> and in the early hours of the morning they withdrew in a perfectly orderly retreat. To the dispassionate critic the fact that the breakdown of order and discipline was only temporary, that it was possible to pull the men together again and keep them in hand throughout many difficult hours, has an important significance. Something like panic may overtake any troops, but it is only in the case of good troops that a panic can be stopped under fire.

Again, there was at least one occasion during the fighting in the oasis when Italian troops, pushing through the gardens under a hot fire from an unseen enemy, came to a halt and declined to proceed when ordered. But the advance was not long delayed. When orders met with no response the officers pressed on alone, and in a few moments the men followed after, their hesitation gone, angry and ashamed that they had checked. Such experiences rank among the commonplaces of war, and the particular instance is only reported here as a mild qualification of the general statement I wish to make : that, taken all round, the Italian soldier did everything he was asked to do, and did it thoroughly well. That he was not asked to do enough has been maintained in a previous chapter, but omissions of this sort ought not to be laid at his door.

<sup>1</sup> An account from the Turkish side explains that the Arabs too had exhausted their ammunition, and they have seldom throughout the war shown the inclination to trust to cold steel that used to distinguish their kinsmen of the Sudan.

Cheerful and brave, Italian soldiers have shown themselves possessed of other virtues roundly denied them in certain quarters, the virtues of patience and perseverance. Perhaps some of the diatribes published during the first three or four months of the war have been forgotten by the public and, possibly, by their writers. A certain type of facile brain is as quick to forget as to invent. For this reason a brief summary of a few hasty criticisms may be to the point.

It was contended that while the Italian soldier might be capable of a spurt, and might conceivably, though improbably, bring a month's campaign to a triumphant close, neither his mind nor his body was equal to a prolonged strain. It was roundly asserted that when the expected walk-over was denied to Italian arms, and the prospect opened up of a long and dragging campaign that promised little glory, the heady enthusiasm of the Italian troops ebbed rapidly, leaving them cold and disheartened. It was further alleged that the Italian soldier was not accustomed to hard work or fatigue, and that for this reason, as well as that found in his disposition, he was naturally unfit to meet the demands of colonial warfare.

The second of the two contentions displays a lamentable ignorance, not only of the Italian army, but of the Italian people. The young workman of North Italy is an unexcelled navvy, who works hard and fares hard and sleeps hard all the year round, and the Italian agriculturist is one of the most tireless and most willing toilers of the world. It is only the ignorance which identifies Italy with the *lazzaroni* of Naples and the touts of tourist Rome that could lead to such misapprehension of the Italian soldier. The frugal workman does not lose his hardiness under the régime which governs his life during his military training,

and the bare idea of an Italian soldier not being accustomed to stern work is ludicrous to any one who has an elementary acquaintance with the facts. Those who are inclined to depreciate the physique of the Italian soldier, and to think that he has no staying power, may be recommended to accompany a regiment of Bersaglieri on a route march, to follow the Alpini or the mountain guns among the winter snows, or even to watch troops doing their ordinary training, say in the Abruzzi.

Naturally the physique of the different regiments in Tripoli, as throughout Italy, varied considerably. The Fenestrelle battalion of Alpini was a magnificent body of men, conspicuous for bone and muscle, broad-shouldered, solid, and sturdy. The Bersaglieri are specially recruited, and their hardiness and activity are, or ought to be, well known to all military critics. But the general level of physique throughout the troops was remarkably high. The men were not big, but they were tough and sound, and even in their thick and ill-fitting uniforms they presented a thoroughly serviceable appearance. Seen stripped, they showed to much better advantage, and it would be hard to find a much higher average of healthy physique than I noticed in a company of the 84th bathing near Gargaresch.

To the allegation that the spirit of the troops was not proof against the prospect of long and hard fighting I can only oppose a blank denial. Up till the middle of January, while an early advance seemed still in prospect, the spirit of the troops was everything that could be desired. It is true that the men were puzzled by the long inaction, and that among the married reservists there were some who expressed a wonder when they would return to their families. In all armies there are men who grumble and

'grouse,' but there were very few in Tripoli during those days of waiting for the word to go.

While the prospect of an early advance still obtained, the attitude of the men was all that could be desired ; when it became evident that no advance was intended, their attitude was all that could be expected. Grumblers became much more frequent, and pertinent questions were put to those who visited the outlying positions.

'Why are we not fighting ?'

'When are we going to advance ?'

'When is this war going to finish ?' This was followed by the disgusted comment : '*E una guerra buffa.*'

The men were bored to death. They had nothing whatever to do, except adorn and elaborate trenches that were already elaborate enough, perform a modicum of drill, keep their kit and accoutrements clean, and go for occasional route marches, within or just outside the lines. British soldiers, in similar circumstances, would have organised cricket and football matches ; but the Italian is not a player of outdoor games, and though an American citizen,<sup>1</sup> an artillery reservist, tried hard to awake an enthusiasm for baseball, his efforts were not successful.

They fell back upon simpler amusements—those boys of twenty to twenty-four. They jumped, and ran, and wrestled, and 'ragged,' like schoolboys. They laid out and planted gardens, and decorated their entrenchments with designs worked out in stones or cartridge cases or empty tins. They raised memorials over the bodies of

<sup>1</sup> The number of Italians from America with the expeditionary force in Tripoli was not less than one thousand. Most of these had returned to do their military training, but many were reservists who had settled for good in the United States, and among these were several full-fledged American citizens, who had come back to their mother-country on the outbreak of the war.

their fallen comrades, and round them planted shrubs and flowers, watering these carefully, till they rushed to quick maturity beneath the spring sunshine. At Ain Zara some soldiers of the 40th regiment filled in the monotonous days by building sand-castles. Modelled from picture post-cards that had come from home, were neatly executed representations of various buildings familiar to the British tourist—the Porta San Paolo at Rome with the Pyramid of Cestius, the mediæval Castle of Ferrara, and others. Some soldiers worked from these pictured realities, but others gave free play to their imagination in working out elaborate original designs in no accepted style of architecture.

It has actually been brought against the Italian soldier that he amused himself in this way. No doubt his play astonished the Arabs, and perhaps aroused their contempt : but some of our most popular amusements may sometimes have excited similar feelings in Oriental minds. To build sand-castles may have been childish, but those ‘children’ fought and died like men when their time came. No doubt the spring months might have been better employed, but that, again, is not the fault of the troops, and there is no sort of justice in a method of criticism which uses such extraordinary handles.

As time went on, and the men had little to do but eat their admirable rations and grow unduly fat, most of them became weary of the situation. They were exceedingly well fed and had very little work. They enjoyed excellent health, and scarcely ever saw an enemy. By all the rules evolved in the minds of Italy’s critics for the making of an imaginary Italian, the soldiers ought to have been perfectly content. Yet they were thoroughly dissatisfied, and frequently said so. They began to grow, by comparison, slack in body and dulled in spirit, and there is no doubt

that by the end of March they were less efficient as military instruments than they had been three months before. Yet on the whole it was a source of surprise to non-Italian correspondents to observe the patience and good-humour of the soldiers, and the ease with which discipline was maintained. A French correspondent, who is also an officer of Reserve, declared roundly that French soldiers would have been on the verge of mutiny under similar conditions, and that the strain imposed by the weary life of the trenches was greater than any troops could bear without deterioration. Imagination could picture the furious discontent of British Tommies in a similar position, a discontent for which one could only admire them, though its manifestations might not infrequently lead straight to the guard-room.

The soldiers were thoroughly disgusted with the situation in the spring, but they accepted the inexplicable with the philosophic resignation that is characteristic of so many Italians. The Italian's nervous system seems framed on an unusual plan ; he is excitable, in that he is easily roused, but on the other hand he does not fret like a Frenchman, or some Northerners. And he preserves his good-humour and willingness when the patience of a *forestière* would be sadly frayed at the edges. Whether these qualities make him a better soldier may be doubted. There is some reason to think that the fretting devil who gets into mischief in peace-time is the man to follow on a battle-field. But this is a moot point, and the place to discuss it is not here.

The men became weary of the war and sulky faces showed more frequently, but their good-humour was never far away. On one occasion a group of soldiers in the oasis asked a correspondent if he would photograph them, so

that they might send the picture home to their families. He had no more films, and suggested another time.

'But when, when?' the men were pressing.

There seemed an opening for a joke, and it was promptly taken :

'When the war is over.'

The soldiers roared with delight. The witticism was one that appealed directly, and they went on their way still chuckling.

Good-humour persisted, and for this reason, probably, discipline was easy. Stories of widespread mutiny and seething discontent, that made it impossible for the Italian generals to order an advance, were sedulously circulated throughout Europe. They are without foundation. No doubt there were some malcontents, such as exist in every army in the field, but it is a fact that will not admit of contention that throughout the long months of the campaign in Tripoli the soldiers were always willing and able to do far more than their leaders would let them do. Tales of Italian demoralisation were common coin in certain circles, but their value may be gauged by the single instance that follows, and a comparison of it with the facts.

A writer who spent some time in the Turkish camp alleged that most of the Italian troops who made the advance upon Ain Zara 'had just been brought from Italy, and were sent straight into action before they could have time to be contaminated by the demoralisation of the troops already in Tripoli.'<sup>1</sup>

Details of the forces which advanced upon Ain Zara have already been given in Chapter V., but for convenience' sake a repetition may be permitted. The force consisted

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy War in Tripoli*, by G. F. Abbott, p. 35. A similar assertion is made in *The Arabs in Tripoli*, by Alan Ostler.

of the 6th, 40th, 82nd, and 84th regiments, the 11th Bersaglieri, the 2nd Grenadiers, and the Fenestrelle battalion of Alpini, with five batteries of mountain guns and two squadrons of the Lodi cavalry. Of these, all except the Grenadiers and the Alpini arrived at Tripoli on October 11 and 12, and were actually the first troops to land in Tripoltania. The Grenadiers were the next to arrive, towards the end of October, and the Alpini battalion was the only unit which had been less than six weeks in the country.

The passage quoted is typical, and comment should be superfluous.

Demoralisation was one favourite word, brutality was another. Inevitably the words recur, ‘a brutal and licentious soldiery.’ There is a certain type of mind which is ready to attribute to the wearers of a military uniform any or all of the more obvious vices. To its possessors stories of Italian brutality must have been meat and drink. No doubt they were able to employ thoroughly logical arguments to commend the fare provided—arguments of this sort: ‘All the world knows that Italians are cruel to animals. One may imagine, then, the brutality towards natives which would be displayed by an Italian in a uniform.’

‘A brutal and licentious soldiery?’ During the months I spent in Tripoli I never saw, in the thronged streets or in the oasis, a single case of brutality or ill-treatment of a native. There were hard words in plenty, generally from distracted drivers endeavouring to push supply trains through the narrow streets. The favourite expression was ‘*Brutta beshtia*,’ and those who know the British soldier can hear him in similar circumstances using the exact equivalent, ‘Ugly swine!’ or conceivably something stronger. I never saw a blow given, or the useful prod with the butt-end of a rifle, and over and over again I was

struck by the patience and good-humour which were displayed in the most irritating circumstances. No doubt there may have been cases of ill-treatment, but if no single minor instance ever came under the eyes of one who for nineteen weeks lived an outdoor life in the town and oasis of Tripoli, it should be obvious that the treatment of the Arab population by the Italian troops was not unreasonably harsh.

If the truth be told, the average Italian is far more free from the tendency to brutality than the average Northerner. The reputation for cruelty to animals, which has lent an unenviable fame to Naples in particular, has done much to mislead English opinion as regards Italian character. No one will be found to deny that the treatment of draught animals in Naples used to be hideous, but this reproach, mainly the result of ignorance and poverty, has largely passed away. And the rest of Italy, taken as a whole, never deserved the condemnation it incurred in common with Naples. Whatever sins may be laid at the door of the Italian, brutality is not one of them. Nor is he *sanguinaire*, in spite of his hot blood, except perhaps in the case of the mixed race which inhabits Sicily.

'Sicilian' was a word that met with hard usage during the campaign against the Italian Army. To the stay-at-home Briton it connotes something essentially lawless, savage, bloodthirsty, and it was a valuable weapon in the armoury of slander. Therefore it was alleged that the troops in Tripoli were for the most part Sicilian ; the picture at once took on verisimilitude from the label attached. That the label was inaccurate mattered little ; the effect was gained. To speak of 'Sicilian' or 'Southern' regiments heightened the impression of mingled funk and fury which it was intended to convey.

One critic committed himself deeply. He condemned the behaviour of the 'Southern' regiments while praising the Bersaglieri, whom he called 'the hardy infantry of the Alps.' In Italy the army is used as a means of eliminating the barriers that have lain between the different States, and especially between North and South. With this end in view, recruitment is non-territorial. Recruits from Sicily and the *Mezzogiorno* are sent North, and vice versa, with the result that the ranks of a regiment stationed in Palermo will probably be more than half filled with men drawn from the provinces north of Rome. For this reason, to talk of 'a Southern regiment' has no real meaning; but to talk of the Bersaglieri as 'the hardy infantry of the Alps' has less than no meaning. For the Alps form the only recruiting district closed to the Bersaglieri. The solitary exception to the rule of non-territorial recruitment is made in the case of the Alpine valleys, where all the recruits go into the Alpini or the mountain artillery, and serve their time in the territorial units of their respective districts.

Again, comment upon the criticism cited should be superfluous. It only remains to add that the writer of it had no opportunity of seeing the Italian troops in action.

Reviewing the qualities of the Italian soldier as they seemed to reveal themselves in Tripoli, the outstanding feature is certainly his cheerful willingness. He was not tried as highly as he might have been, and it is not altogether easy to estimate his capabilities under the conditions which would obtain in a European war or in the circumstances which would have attended a desert expedition. Some attempt has been made to compare the work of the Italian soldier with that of the Bulgarian, to the

obvious disadvantage of the former, but the comparison is surely inapt. The Bulgarians have been fighting against the hereditary enemy of their race, to avenge the long-drawn-out oppression of five centuries. The factor of race hatred could hardly be overestimated, and no comparison between the feats of a nation in arms, fighting almost for its existence, and the work of an expeditionary force in a colonial war, can reasonably be drawn. Two facts should not be lost sight of in judging the fighting value of the Italian troops in Tripoli : first, that they were very young ; second, that the units which formed the expeditionary corps were composite units. For political reasons no doubt, the 1888 class of reservists was the only one to be called to the colours on the outbreak of war ; and this fact, which implied a youthful rank and file, was mainly responsible also for the despatch of composite battalions. Obviously a unit reduced to half its peace establishment by the dismissal of the 1889 class could not fill its ranks, even up to the low war strength<sup>1</sup> fixed for the occasion, by the incorporation of a single class of its reservists. The gaps were filled by drafts of reservists and colour service men belonging to other regiments. A reinforcing reason for the call upon only one class may have been the wish to draw the troops for the expedition from over as wide a range as possible, but, in any case, the results were not wholly satisfactory. Composite units can never be expected to give the same results as units where officers, non-commissioned officers, and men have all learned to know and trust one another.

For the reasons detailed the Tripoli expeditionary force, even after several weeks' hard work, was still to some

<sup>1</sup> The battalions embarked for Tripoli about eight hundred strong.

extent an army in the making. Some of the regiments had hardened into first-class troops, but others were still on the raw side, and unfortunately, just as they were getting into their stride, the work that was completing their education came to an abrupt and prolonged pause. But in the later encounters, some of them rendered additionally arduous by excessive heat, the men fought thoroughly well.

It is a sound military axiom that the value of the men who constitute an army depends directly upon their officers, and the truth has of late been forcibly illustrated in the case of the Turks. Not least among the causes which led to the Turkish disasters in Thrace and Macedonia was the lack of a proper touch and understanding between officers and men. If this test of touch and understanding be applied to the Italian Army, the result is altogether satisfactory. A well-known English politician, a keen democratic observer, whose hobby it is to follow the armies of Europe on manœuvres, is reported to have declared that the only two European armies where thoroughly satisfactory relations were to be found between officers and men were the British and the Italian. The relations that exist in the different countries differ as the races differ, but it is permissible to believe that the officers of each country have hit upon the system which best suits the national characteristics. It is not too much to say that in Italy the company commander's attitude towards his men is very often marked by a real affection that has something of the paternal in it, and the feeling of the men is the natural complement of this. There is a *naïveté* and simplicity about the relation that is refreshing, that in Tripoli, sometimes, was very touching. Perhaps the family feeling is fostered by the fact that while there are no old soldiers in the

ranks, the company commander is often a veteran well over forty.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the campaign the courage and devotion of the officers never failed. They set their men the examples of bravery, coolness, and cheerfulness, and they found their reward in seeing the examples followed. In face of the admirable qualities they have displayed, one has a natural hesitation in suggesting the existence of a serious defect in the officer corps. Yet the criticism must in justice be made, and it deals with a question which has been agitating the minds of various reformers in Italy.

Taken as a whole, the officers are too old. There are too many subalterns of thirty-five. There are too many company commanders with middle-aged figures and whitening hairs, men who have lost the necessary spring and vigour—and the loss, generally speaking, comes sooner with a Southern race than with us. There are, or were before the war, no major-generals under fifty, and many colonels, even a good many majors, over that age. The results are obvious. The company officers and battalion commanders are frequently too old for their work, while the colonels and generals are entrusted with real initiative, for the first time, at an age when they ought already to have been thoroughly familiar with its exercise. In a proportion of cases the necessary mental activity survives the long years of subordinate routine, but it is surely clear that a man who does not taste real military responsibility

<sup>1</sup> One small instance of remissness on the part of the company officers was the more noticeable by reason of the shepherding care generally exercised over the soldiers. Too little attention was paid to the men's feet. Where there are no old campaigners in the ranks to preach the sin of slackness in regard to care of the feet, the greater responsibility lies upon the officers. This responsibility was inexplicably neglected in Tripoli, and the sandy going caused a good deal of foot trouble which might readily have been avoided.

till he is fifty or fifty-five is much less fitted to exercise it than if it had come ten years earlier.

On the whole, the non-commissioned officers seemed hardly up to the level attained by the officers and the rank and file. A lack of initiative was observable, and of control over their small commands, a lack that was all the more important as the complement of officers to a battalion was only eighteen. There were not too many opportunities during the winter of coming to a definite judgment on this point, and it is possible that the suggestion of these deficiencies may not be altogether justified. But the impression recorded, which was based upon observation, has been strengthened by inquiry.

To sum up, there seems every ground for the opinion that if the Italian Army were engaged in a European war, its soldiers would win for themselves a high reputation, a reputation such as they have been given too little chance of winning in the Tripolitaine. They are not smart in our sense of the word. They are free and easy, in a way even slack. There is no attempt at the iron-handed control characteristic of the German Army, and, even according to the less rigid British standard, the methods of discipline seem rather lax. But the officer gets out of his men what he wants, and the ends of discipline are thereby nearly attained. A keen spirit, an unquenchable cheerfulness, an enduring physique, and willing obedience—these qualities the Italian soldier has shown that he possesses, and they count far towards the making of an army.

At the beginning of the war there was a certain amount of nervousness in Italian military circles regarding the possibilities of the troops. Italy's previous experience of a colonial campaign had been disastrous in the extreme, and though the débâcle at Adowa had been largely due to

rash leadership, the Abyssinian success could not have been so complete if the Italian troops had shown themselves worthy descendants of the men who fought for the freedom of Italy. It was recognised on all hands that the spirit and the training of the army were very different from what they had been in the nineties ; but the shadow still lowered, and the senior officers at least could not forget that their men were untried. If at the beginning of the war the leaders had possessed that confidence in their men which they gained by experience, it is probable that hostilities would have been brought to a much swifter close.

As far as organisation is concerned, there is a general consensus of opinion that the Italian Army came out of its trial with great credit. The delay in the arrival of the troops was due to political circumstances, not to military defects. The landing operations, carried out in two or three instances under conditions of great difficulty, were conducted with great skill and celerity. Some mention has already been made of the supply services, and of the work done by the motor transport. The motors employed were for the most part 24-30 h.p. Fiats built to carry thirty cwt., with engines specially cased for protection against the sand. The back wheels were double. A lighter and less powerful type of car was tried at first simultaneously with the Fiats, but was less successful.

The question of supplies, in the field and to the outlying positions, was greatly simplified by the arrival of the motors. In the earlier days transport and commissariat officers were dependent upon Sicilian and Alpine carts, drawn by mules, and upon the comparatively small number of weakly, undersized camels which were found in Tripoli. These readily sufficed for the short distances between the town and the trenches, but when the Italian positions were

extended to include Ain Zara, Tajura, and Gargaresh, the difficulty of supplying the troops was greatly increased. Trains of laden camels and convoys of bullocks still plodded their slow way along the sandy tracks, but the motors did the bulk of the work.

Throughout the campaign the men were admirably fed, though a shortage of supplies threatened more than once during the early weeks, owing to rough weather. An early breakfast of coffee and bread was followed by two substantial meals, at 10 and 4 : macaroni or another *pasta*, or else a *minestra in brodo*, a thick and nourishing broth, followed by meat and vegetables, and sometimes tinned fruit. The quality of the food was excellent, and it was well prepared. Many a spectator had cause to be thankful for the soldiers' fare, for the broth, and the savoury stew that followed, and the well-made bread, were much superior to the food provided by the so-called 'hotels' in the town. The meat was sometimes fresh and sometimes tinned, and the most palatable dish was the tinned ration of meat and vegetables, that made an excellent ragout.

Thoroughly well fed, leading a hard outdoor life in a magnificent climate, the soldiers naturally enjoyed excellent health, when the cholera had been stamped out and a number of cases of enteric had given them an additional warning to be careful how they quenched their thirst. But the high standard of health which prevailed continuously after the end of December was obviously due to the medical authorities, whose work is deserving of the very highest praise.

At the beginning of November the authorities were face to face with a very ugly situation. Cholera had been brought into the lines and into the town from the oasis, and had spread with alarming rapidity among troops and



MOTOR TRANSPORT WAGGONS



A SUPPLY TRAIN ON ITS WAY TO AIN ZARA



natives alike. Some correspondents, who left Tripoli at the beginning of the epidemic, reported that the authorities were wholly unable to cope with the difficulties of the position, and a melancholy picture of wretchedness and inefficiency was telegraphed all over the world. At that time any stick seemed good enough to beat the Italians with, and the cholera epidemic was frequently adduced as a further instance of fault on their part.

The problem was faced with energy and resolution, and the measures which were taken met with gratifying success. It was comparatively easy to deal with the disease among the soldiers ; the organisation was already in existence, and military discipline made the enforcement of sanitary measures a simple matter. The native population presented a different and more knotty problem, which was promptly and energetically tackled. The Government appointed a committee of three to superintend the work—Surgeon-General Sforza, chief of the Army Medical Corps in Tripoli, Marchese Negrotto Cambiaso, chief of the Red Cross volunteers, and Professor Basile, a well-known physician who was specially sent from Italy ; and the following measures were taken.

The town was divided into three main districts, each under the joint charge of a military and a civil doctor, the latter in each case being a resident practitioner, accustomed to dealing with the native population. To each of these districts was allotted a ‘squadra,’ or squad, consisting of Red Cross men with an interpreter, which worked under the direction of the doctors in charge. These squads were charged with the duty of investigating the respective districts, of finding out and removing cases of cholera or suspected cases, and of disinfecting the houses where cases had occurred. Besides the three district squads, there

were two others in the town itself, which were supplementary ; these assisted in one district or another as the exigencies of the moment demanded. In addition to the staff appointed for the town, there was the staff attached to the *lazaretto civile* outside the town, which was responsible for all cases among the natives without the city boundaries. Lastly, there was a special squad, under the direction of a civil doctor, whose business it was to look after the streets of the town. This work was accomplished with surprising thoroughness considering the many difficulties there were to contend with, and by the middle of November the town of Tripoli, so far as its streets were concerned, might claim to be quite reasonably clean. But the province of this 'squadra' extended far beyond ordinary scavenging. The streets were liberally sprayed with disinfectants, with the result that the manifold odours of Turkish Tripoli were soon submerged in the all-conquering smell of carbolic.

All these measures were specifically directed against the cholera epidemic, but it was found necessary to pay close attention to smallpox as well, and an extra squad was detailed to cope with this loathsome disease.

The native population was of course very hard to deal with, especially the floating Arab population from the oasis and the desert, among whom the greater number of cholera cases occurred. But the methods adopted met with remarkable success. In a week the epidemic was checked ; in a fortnight it was well in hand, and obviously spending itself ; in a month the number of cases was reduced to three or four a day. For another month occasional cases were reported, but the last occurred early in January. Fortunately the disease took an unusually mild form. The average mortality among the soldiers was remarkably low (a little over twenty per cent.), and gives rise

to the suspicion that not all the cases were true cholera, and, while the proportion of deaths among the natives was very high, it may safely be said that this fact was due to their unspeakably wretched condition, the result of prolonged malnutrition and disease.

With the disappearance of the cholera the public health of Tripoli ceased to be a serious preoccupation to the military authorities, but the heads of the medical and sanitary services continued their admirable work, and succeeded in preserving a magnificent record of health. There was an unpleasant moment towards the end of January, when typhus made its appearance in the town. Eleven cases were quickly reported, but the spread of the disease was checked and no others appeared. The soldiers suffered mainly from enteric, malaria, and rheumatism. But the malarious cases were '*recidivi*,' men who had been infected in Italy and had fallen ill again under the stress of exposure. The *anopheles* does not seem to exist in Tripoli or the near neighbourhood, and in the town there is apparently no mosquito of any sort. There were certainly none from November till March. There does, however, seem to be a local fever of a kind, for various soldiers in the trenches and at Ain Zara were attacked by a fever that, from description, seems more like a sharp influenza than anything else. Residents in Tripoli say it is common among the Arabs, who call it 'Father of the stick,' in allusion to the bruised and aching feeling which is the most prominent symptom.

After Christmas the number of enteric cases at any given time was inconsiderable, though the disease continued for some months to claim its scattered victims among the troops. Sickness of other kinds almost disappeared. In March I paid a visit to a Red Cross hospital of one hundred beds, which I had seen full in December. There were

eighteen patients in the hospital, seven in the separate enteric ward, and for long the number had been nearly as low. This instance was typical. The hospitals had very little to do, and the Red Cross doctors were devoting practically all their attention to the natives, but lurid reports persisted regarding the plague-stricken condition of Tripoli and its environs. According to these reports the Italian troops, both at Ain Zara and Tripoli, were 'decimated by disease,' which was still raging unchecked in the spring. It is difficult to imagine what honest purpose could have been served by the concoction and publication of these legends.

As summer approached, there was a certain amount of apprehension lest cholera should reappear, and the sanitary authorities increased their vigilance. The fear proved groundless, and during the summer months the percentage of disease among the troops in Tripoli was actually less than in the garrisons in Italy.<sup>1</sup> The doctors had fought a stiff fight and won a great victory.<sup>2</sup>

No attempt, however sketchy, to review the work done by the Italian army in Tripoli would be complete without a special reference to the achievements of the airships and aeroplanes. For no one could have watched this part of the work without being profoundly impressed by the skill and coolness of the Italian air-pilots and firmly convinced of the practical value of aviation in war. It is, of course, true that the conditions were specially favourable, in that

<sup>1</sup> This applies to Tripoli and the neighbourhood. There were serious epidemics of enteric at Misurata and Zuara.

<sup>2</sup> Special mention should be made of the work done by the civilian doctors and surgeons of the Red Cross Society, which reinforced the *Corpo Sanitario Militare* in all its branches. The Society does much good work in Italy, notably in the Sicilian sulphur mines, and in the war it offered a welcome channel to the patriotic endeavour which animated the whole Italian nation. The equipment of the different field hospitals in Tripoli varied considerably, but the devotion of the doctors and surgeons and the energy of the administrative staff were alike admirable.



*Photo A. Malvezzi*

RED CROSS HOSPITAL



*Photo A. Malvezzi*

RED CROSS ISOLATION HOSPITAL



there was no hostile air-fleet to limit the possibilities of action ; but in any case it is abundantly clear that no nation can afford to go to war with a marked inferiority in aerial strength. The various aeroplane flights accomplished during the winter by Captain Moizo, Captain Piazza and Lieutenant Gavotti, to Gharian and Tarhuna and back—one hundred and forty miles over an enemy's country—stand out as the feats which make most appeal to the imagination. But from the practical standpoint the most remarkable features of the year's work are the frequency and regularity of the ascents and the small number of serious mishaps. There were a good many narrow escapes. On several occasions the aeroplanes were hit by rifle bullets ; two airmen were wounded, one seriously, but both were able to fly back to camp ; and on three occasions at least a flight might have ended in disaster owing to the stoppage of the motor. Twice, a long glide from a great height brought the airman to the ground in safety within the Italian outpost lines. On the third occasion, already described, the airman was forced to descend nine miles from home, fortunately in an empty stretch of desert. Another airman fell into the sea off Benghazi, but was rescued, and the only serious casualty was the capture of one of the most skilful and experienced officers, Captain Moizo. During the first six months of the war Captain Moizo had made no fewer than eighty-two flights, and early in April he was sent home on leave. Returning to Tripoli after a few weeks' absence he resumed his work, but on the morning of September 10, on a flight from Zuara to Tripoli, he was forced to descend between Zawia and Zanzur. He was captured and taken to Azizia, where he remained a prisoner till the end of the war.

Luck was with the airmen on various occasions, but luck

was only the just reward of the skill and certainty displayed. Strong winds blew in Tripoli with unusual persistence during the greater part of the winter, and at all times the atmospheric conditions presented considerable difficulties, the air being full of holes. Yet in the first six months of the war, while Captain Moizo made the greatest number of flights, Lieutenants Gavotti and Roberti came within two of his record, and Captain Piazza flew seventy times. Many other airmen did brilliant work, and by means of these scouting expeditions the Italian generals were regularly apprised of the enemy's movements and approximate strength, while the country between the coast and the mountains was carefully explored, and its main features noted. It was found that considerable experience was necessary before any accurate estimate could be formed, either of natural features or as to the presence and movements of troops. But the eye became gradually accustomed to the task of exploration, and the work done was of the greatest assistance in determining the errors in existing maps, and furnishing details for the new *carte dimostrative*, which were compiled during the spring. One lesson was quickly learned: that civilian airmen, however expert as flyers, cannot compare, for war purposes, with military and naval officers trained to make observations and deductions from the military point of view.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the gale which sprang up on the afternoon of December 16 and destroyed the nearly completed hangars,

<sup>1</sup> In Libya five types of aeroplane were used during the winter—Nieuport, Blériot, Deperdussin, Etrich, and Henri Farman. But progress in construction is continuous, and, in the opinion of Italian experts, the Nieuport is the only one of these which (up to the present) maintains its place among the best half-dozen. The six machines considered most satisfactory by one of the chief authorities in Italy are, among monoplanes, the Nieuport, Hanriot, Bristol, and the new Morane, and among biplanes, the latest Maurice Farman model and the new-type Rumpler-Etrich.



THE FIRST FLIGHT OF AN AIRSHIP IN TRIPOLI



THE HANGAR FOR THE AIRSHIPS



the military airships came late upon the scene. It was not until March 4 that the two airships P2 and P3 ascended together and made a flight which lasted over two hours. Subsequently they made many successful flights, including a two-hundred mile run from Tripoli to the Tunis frontier and back. This flight was specially noteworthy from the fact that the airships took to the water off Bu Kamesh, in a heavy wind and a rough sea, in order to lay in a fresh stock of benzine before continuing their voyage.

It should be said that the Italian airships already in use are considered merely as experimental types, though they have done remarkably good work. The P type at present in use, with a gas capacity of 4500 cubic metres and a speed of a little over 50 kilometres an hour, is considered too small and too slow for military requirements. The new M1, with a capacity of 12,000 cubic metres and motors of 400 h.p., has a speed of over 70 kilometres an hour. It is expected that she will be able to make a continuous flight of from thirty-five to forty hours at a height of 1000 metres, and her radius of action in average weather is calculated at 1000 kilometres. Three of this type are already under construction, and it is probable that at least half a dozen will be provided for military purposes, while a still larger airship (Model G) has been designed. (The letters refer to the size of the types—P standing for *piccolo*, M for *medio* and G for *grande*.)

Bomb-dropping, whether from airship or aeroplane, does not appear to have been attended by any great measure of success, and it is not unlikely that the possibilities of early development in this direction have been overrated. For some time to come the real duty of aerial craft will be that of reconnaissance, and it is hardly possible to exaggerate the value to a commanding-general of a numerous and well-

handled air-fleet. The sketch-maps and photographs done during flight by Italian airmen in Tripoli ; the information brought during the actual progress of fighting, notably at the battle of Sidi Bilal ; the more detailed maps and more careful photographs supplied by the officers on board the airships—these are sufficient indication of the possibilities of accurate reconnaissance under the most modern conditions.

At the outbreak of the war in Tripoli the Italian air corps was still in the early stages of its development ; and for this reason the more credit is due to those who made such a striking success of their work. A few officers had long devoted all their energies to persuade the authorities of the future which lay before aerial navigation, and enthusiasm had succeeded so far that the War Office had constructed airship-yards and military aeroplane centres, together with a large experimental factory. Three airships had been built some years before and used on manœuvres, but they had been condemned as too small and too slow, and none of the new type designed and under construction was ready. At the beginning of the war only a handful of officers had secured the exacting *brevetto militare*, which, among other qualifications, demands that the airman shall ascend to a height of 1000 metres and make a cross-country flight of 150 kilometres.

The magnificent work done in Tripoli and Cyrenaica has given a great impetus to military aviation in Italy, and a scheme has already been worked out and passed which indicates an immense increase in the Italian aerial fleets. To Colonel Moris and the men who have worked with him for the progress of aviation in the Italian army and navy the record of what has been done in Tripoli, and the prospect of great developments in the future, must have brought a fitting reward.

## CHAPTER XII

## ITALIAN, ARAB, AND TURK

THROUGHOUT this book, following a usual custom, the term 'Arab' has been used to represent, generically, the inhabitants of Tripolitania. The usage is inaccurate, but this would matter less, in default of a better term, if it were not at the same time particularly misleading. To the word 'Arab' there attach, inevitably, associations and interpretations that are not generally valid in the case of the Tripolitan peoples. It seems to call up visions of tameless nomad warriors, hooded and silent, fierce and implacable, leading a pastoral existence that is varied only by joyous excursions for battle and rapine. While the description might fit a certain selected minority in the two provinces, it is altogether misleading as applied to the whole country, and especially to Tripolitania.

Three main stocks have gone to make up the Tripolitan peoples—Arab, Berber, and Negroid; and, while in certain places the types have remained comparatively pure, over a great part of the country the mixture of races is such as to defy disentanglement. Roughly speaking, the Arabs are supposed to occupy the coast strip of Tripolitania, and the Berbers the Jebel and the tableland that slopes to the south, while in the Fezzan the negro influence from the far interior has naturally made itself most strongly felt. But Berbers and Arabs, in certain districts, are quite inextricably mixed, and while from all accounts the mountain

Berbers have kept themselves comparatively free from negro admixture, the black blood has spread, by means of numberless slave generations, all along the northern rim of the country. Tripoli itself, as the capital town, the terminus of two great caravan routes, and long the chief slave-mart of North Africa, does not show a typical population. But the group on the opposite page, a chance group taken at Tajura, gives some idea of the variation in type that is met with on the coast. The bulky, thick-lipped negroid, almost black, the slender thoroughbred of the pious legend, hook-nosed and bronzed, the white-faced degenerate that is not uncommon on the littoral—they are all in the group, and intermediate types as well.

It may be as a result of his mixed blood that the Tripolitan Arab is not essentially either a warrior or a herd. He is a good fighting-man, but battle is not meat and drink to him, as to some of his relatives. Perhaps this follows from the fact that instead of being only a nomad herdsman, he has a distinct leaning towards agriculture, wherever he can make things grow without too much effort or understanding. The Berbers of the hills are diligent, if unskilled, cultivators, while the blacks from the far south brought with them their own rude knowledge of husbandry, and under the double influence the greater part of the population has resorted to tillage where tillage has been possible, given the primitive methods available. So it is that the majority of the 'Arabs' are comparatively peaceful agriculturists, who look with dislike and fear, in normal circumstances, upon those of their kinsmen who continue to lead a nomad life on the untilled steppes. The Berber hillmen seem, on the whole, to be the most pugnacious of the inhabitants, always excepting the distant Tuareg, though the Arabs of Sliten are reputed especially quarrel-



A GROUP OF "ARABS" AT TAJURA

*Photo G. Della Gherardesca*



some. Generally speaking, the coast tribes are peacefully inclined, while the Fezzanese are well known to be unwarlike, and seem, from most accounts, to be a kindly and hospitable people.

Between the Turk and the true Arab there is a deep antagonism that centuries of association have not bridged, and in the subject races of Tripolitania hostility to the Turk is firmly rooted. Everywhere it may be found, and though in the year of their brave and hopeless struggle the Turks attached the Arabs to them as never before, there are no regrets for their going.

Some twenty years ago a Turkish officer stationed in Tripoli took to wife an Arab girl of unusual beauty. The marriage was far from being a success, and their domestic unhappiness culminated in an appeal by the woman for the protection of the authorities. She alleged that she feared the violence of her husband, and prayed for a divorce. In reality the cause of the trouble was sheer incompatibility, and in support of her claim for protection she gave a striking illustration of the truth. Apparently the unfriendly atmosphere of his home had roused the Turk to exasperation and to the conviction that any improvement was hopeless. He had seized his wife, and, baring her thigh and his own, had grimly declared : ‘If I should cut flesh there from your body and here from mine, and put the two pieces in a pot and boil them together, even then they could not mix. For Turk and Arab must always be separate.’ The woman feared that he might one day make the test, and the Cadi recognised that their matrimonial differences were essentially incurable. A divorce was granted forthwith ; the woman married one of her own people, and lives in Tripoli to-day.

In view of the mutual antagonism which is illustrated

by the foregoing story, there is some ground for surprise in the apparent solidarity of the Arab co-operation with the Turkish garrisons. It has been suggested by some writers that community of religion supplied the agent which united two such dissident elements, and that the war waged against the Italians was in fact a Holy War, of Moslem against Christian. Such a view scarcely seems to be borne out by the evidence. Undoubtedly the religious influence made itself strongly felt, and it may have been the hope of striking a blow for Islam, as well as mere lust of battle and loot, that brought into the fighting-line dark warriors from the farther deserts, as well as the Arabs and Berbers of Tripolitania proper. On the other hand, it does not appear that a *Jehad* was formally proclaimed, or that any unusual anti-Christian feeling was manifested by the Tripolitan Arabs during the hostilities. It is perfectly evident that if a Holy War had been declared, or even if religious feeling had been the main factor in the Arab resistance, those correspondents and other European visitors, who were welcomed and entertained by Turks and Arabs alike, would have met with very different treatment. A true *Jehad* would have dealt faithfully with every unbeliever who ventured among the faithful. Modern Mohammedan usage does not appear to favour the declaration of a Holy War in similar circumstances, and both Turkish and Arab leaders were emphatic in their disavowal of the idea. No doubt there were fanatics in the Arab ranks ; but, allowing all due weight to religious influences, it is necessary to look elsewhere to account fully for the remarkable co-operation of two races which were accustomed to regard each other with profound dislike.

To say that Italy was the common enemy is not a sufficient answer ; nor is it even wholly true. While the Italians



TRIPOLITAN TYPES



A PRISONER FROM THE INTERIOR, A "MARABOUT,"  
OR HOLY MAN, WHO WAS STIRRING UP  
MISCHIEF IN TRIPOLI  
*Photo Captain Mola*



were misled as to the extent of the support they would receive from the Arabs, there was no widespread hostility among these, initially at least, to the Italian occupation of their country. Correspondents on the Turkish side<sup>1</sup> have recounted how the sheikhs of the coast villages were ready to make their submission, and how only the slowness of the Italians and the energetic co-operation of Ferhat Bey and Suleiman el Barouni with the Turkish leaders succeeded in enlisting Arab support. All the evidence goes to show that the Arabs of Tripoli took up arms against the Italians with hesitation and misgiving.

The slowness of the Italians did much to bring the Arabs down on the far side of the fence, but it is possible that the danger of delay might have been obviated if the authorities had shown greater intelligence in their dealings with the native population. Apparently the Italians came to Tripoli without a considered 'Arab policy,' nor were they quick to repair an omission which is a further proof, if any were needed, of the haste with which the expedition was conceived. The Italian Government had received much information to the effect that the Arabs detested the Turks, and the idea seems to have been prevalent that they could practically be ignored as a factor in the campaign, that Italy could count at least upon their acquiescence in the occupation. Whether the Italian attitude was in fact based upon this assumption, or whether it was the result of mere oversight, there is little doubt that in the early days of the occupation a chance of securing Arab allegiance was definitely let slip. For the authorities failed to realise the part that would be played by sheikhs and notables in deciding the attitude of the tribesmen. Ingenuously enough, they seem

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Alan Ostler of the *Daily Express*, Mr. G. F. Abbott, and M. Georges Rémond of *L'Illustration*.

to have imagined that they could deal directly with 'the people' by means of a display of goodwill and a proclamation of good intentions. The just resolve to treat the Arabs with every consideration was carried so far that if a soldier and an Arab came into collision, the soldier was assumed to be guilty. This excess of consideration was naturally taken as a sign of weakness, and at the same time the authorities showed an unaccountable neglect of the sheikhs, whose co-operation was essential to the securing of Arab submission.

During the first ten or twelve days of the occupation Arab notables came into Tripoli to make submission to their new overlord, and to be confirmed in their positions as heads of their tribes. They were received with every courtesy, but there seems to have been little or no attempt to remove their natural misgivings as to the future, to reassure them as to their positions and emoluments. There was a disastrous failure, on the part of those responsible, to realise the essential principle which should govern all dealings with primitive peoples—the principle of securing the chiefs and working through them. It seems clear that chiefs who had actually made submission to the Italians, or were ready to do so, were induced by the neglect of the authorities to throw in their lot with the Turks.

A further reason for the general support given to the Turks by the Arabs of Tripoli must certainly have been supplied by the repression which followed upon the revolt in the oasis, or, to be exact, by the accounts of this repression which were passed from mouth to mouth throughout the country, becoming ever more lurid in their passage. It has been justly remarked by more than one writer that whatever the facts may have been, the Arabs believed that

there had been a wholesale massacre which spared neither age nor sex, so that hatred and revenge were added to the motives which inspired resistance to the Italians. The lying tongues of rumour did their work very thoroughly, and it was only after peace was declared that men who had fought for a year in the belief that their wives and children had been massacred, came back to find them safe and sound in Tripoli, fed and clothed and doctored by those who had been accused of wholesale butchery.

Although the various motives outlined above were sufficient to induce the Arabs to make common cause with the Turks during the first weeks of the war, there is every reason to believe that the association of Arab and Turk would not have long resisted more vigorous action on the part of the Italians. For if one thing is clear from the various accounts which have come from those on the Turkish side, it is that the adherence of the Arabs to the Turkish cause was specially fortified by a disbelief in the prowess and wealth of the Italians. The conviction of Italian poverty, originally due, no doubt, to a hearsay knowledge of the Italian proletariat in Tunis, had been carefully fostered by the Turks, and the failure of the Italian Government to secure any redress for the murder of its nationals had lowered a prestige that had never stood very high. This initial handicap could only have been overcome by a prompt demonstration of Italian strength, and when Italy deliberately refrained from the attempt to strike a convincing blow, the result was an automatic confirmation of the low-rated esteem in which she was held.

The whole question of prestige seems to have been insufficiently regarded by the Italian authorities. They may hardly be criticised for the failure to sustain Italian prestige in Tripolitania before the outbreak of war: in face of the

attitude displayed by Turkey it seems clear that nothing but the measures eventually adopted could have ensured the satisfactory consideration of Italian interests and the proper treatment of Italian subjects. Nor is it altogether fair to condemn the absence of a settled Arab policy prior to the war. Curiously enough, it is the opponents of the whole Tripoli enterprise who are most scornful of Italy's failure to preface the occupation by adequate political preparation. There is a difficulty in reconciling the attitudes. Attempts to 'prepare' the Arabs for an Italian occupation were hardly consonant with the maintenance of Turkish rule in Tripolitania, and the very slightness of this preparation might be fairly quoted as evidence of Italy's reluctance to proceed to extremities with Turkey. On the other hand, the decision to initiate an Arab policy of conciliation and promises, before Italian prestige had been satisfactorily established by force of arms, would seem to have been an error in tactics. The various proclamations which were showered upon Arab encampments from air-ships and aeroplanes might have had an admirable effect if they had followed decisive action in the field. As it was, they were regarded by the Arabs as the confession of a weakness that had to rely upon persuasion rather than force. And in order to win an Arab by words it seems essential to demonstrate that behind the will to persuade there lies the power to compel.

The necessity for impressing the native population with a wholesome conviction of Italian strength was the more urgent in view of the fact that one of the chief obstacles in the way of an acceptance of Italian rule, an obstacle more effective than religious fanaticism or patriotic devotion, lay in the secular prestige of the Turk. The Turks were not liked in Tripolitania ; their influence and their

rule had brought nothing but evil to a country already in decay ; there, as elsewhere, they had failed in the duties of government. But the Turks are a dominant race, and they have known how to impress the fact upon the peoples they have ruled. Strange mixture of great qualities and gross defects, the Turk is a man and a master of men.

While the war was in progress, there were many who scouted as ludicrous the idea that the small Turkish nucleus in Tripolitania was in any great degree responsible for the Arab resistance, or that the Turks were in any way able to compel the Arabs to join them against the Italians. To the contention that the Arabs, or many of them, fought unwillingly, it was replied that the small numbers of the Turks put such an idea out of the question. The argument takes no account of history or of human nature. To suggest that a small minority cannot by prestige constrain a great majority to its uses is to take up a wholly untenable position. Many instances to the contrary might be quoted, but one may suffice.

When the gradual advance of Anglo-Egyptian troops promised the Sudan a deliverance from the appalling tyranny which had scourged it so long, a great proportion of the Khalifa's men fought only under the compulsion of fear. In point of fact the Khalifa's power and the whole dervish resistance were, latterly, based upon the Baggara and a few kindred tribes, who formed an insignificant minority of the population of the Sudan. Yet this minority imposed its will upon the other peoples of the Sudan to the extent of making them take up arms for the rule that was grinding them to dust. The fact was so clearly recognised that men who had fought vainly against us one day were enlisted in Sudanese battalions the next, and never gave cause for distrust.

There can be no doubt that a great number of the Arabs who fought against the Italians did so unwillingly. It is, of course, true that they were first raised and led by their own chiefs, Ferhat Bey and Suleiman el Barouni, but it is equally true that, without the Turkish nucleus at headquarters, the Turkish garrisons scattered here and there over the country, and the long prestige of the Turkish name, there would have been no real resistance to Italian arms. Many Arabs are emphatic upon this point ; the fact seems borne out by the instant collapse of the Arab resistance which followed upon the formal ending of the Italo-Turkish war ; and it needs no imagination to appreciate the unfortunate position in which the Arabs found themselves, placed between the devil with whom they were well acquainted and the deep sea that was a new factor in their existence.

According to the accounts of some correspondents the Turks in Tripolitania expected European intervention, and it was doubtless in this expectation that they hopefully bombarded Europe with false news. Correspondents on the Turkish side seem to have been very unlucky in missing such fighting as did take place, and it is clear that the authorities were not anxious that they should be in a position to see things for themselves. The fact is clearly, though unconsciously, evidenced by Mr. Alan Ostler's book, *The Arabs in Tripoli*. Mr. Ostler arrived at the Turkish camp at Ain Zara about the middle of November, and stayed there till December 4, but he seems to have known nothing of the fight on November 26, which resulted in the reoccupation of the Fort Messri and El Hanni, for he writes : 'I had been for some three weeks amongst the Turks before the Italians ventured out into the open. It was on the fourth of December. . . .' The constant

A TRIPOLITAN JEWESS



AN ARAB WOMAN





skirmishing in the oasis, and the systematic bombardments by the *Carlo Alberto* (always described as 'the fleet' by writers on the Turkish side), not to speak of the whole day's fighting on November 26, made him think at first, quite rightly, 'that fighting was afoot in some quarter or another,' which he was not allowed to see. But he was successfully persuaded by the Turks that nothing was happening, or had happened.

The instance is illuminating. All through the winter and the spring correspondence was sent over Europe which was begotten solely of Oriental imagination. Unfortunately, much of it has found its way into book form, and tends to perpetuate misapprehensions which were better removed. Grossly distorted versions of actual happenings, accounts of entirely mythical actions in which the Italians (of course) suffered defeat, legends of Italian demoralisation and reports that the Italian camps continued to be devastated by disease—all these were concocted at the Turkish headquarters and disseminated by whatever means appeared best. A correspondent eager for news—there was little enough to be had—was a ready prey, and the Turks made good use of the instruments that lay to their hands. Sometimes, no doubt, the limits of ordinary credulity were overpassed, and the spoon-fed information was rejected by the recipient. In no way daunted, the Turkish press-bureau played another card. If the correspondent would not serve, his name would. So it came about that a French correspondent, returning to Tunis, found in his paper, signed by his name, telegrams which he had never written or sent. It is impossible not to admire the resource of the Turkish authorities. Their fraud, of course, was certain of eventual detection, but they founded themselves upon the eternal truth that a lie,

once started, can hardly be run to earth, and they played for such benefit as might accrue in the meantime.

One would like to know who was responsible for the steady current of false information that had its springs at the Turkish headquarters. Whose rod struck forth water in the wilderness to quench the longing of the thirsty correspondent? It was a turbid flow, and often rather 'salt,' as desert waters are apt to be, but it served its purpose. Perhaps some day we shall be vouchsafed authentic information as to the miracle. Meanwhile, there are stories that tell of an Ottoman Jew, a man of wide and varied experience, who combined in his person the seemingly incompatible rôles of correspondent and censor. . . . But speculations are vain for the present, and it is enough to acknowledge the ability and the persistence with which the Turkish authorities conducted their press campaign.

While certain stories were for the European public, and others were for Arab consumption, some were spread abroad which made the double appeal. Chief among these were the reports of atrocities and the announcements of Italian defeats, but occasionally a more subtle invention betrayed itself. Noteworthy among such instances was the story of an Italian proclamation, distributed from aeroplanes, which explained to the Arabs of Tripoli that Great Britain and France had wished to divide their country, and that Italy had stepped in to save them from this fate. No such proclamation, of course, was ever made by the Italian authorities,<sup>1</sup> but if the story is not pure invention it can readily be accounted for on the supposition that a bogus pamphlet was circulated, purporting to come from the Italians. The objects of such invention or forgery are

<sup>1</sup> When the report was published in a London newspaper, I obtained a formal contradiction of it from Signor Giolitti.

clear enough : in the first place, to prejudice public opinion in the countries mentioned ; in the second place, to stimulate Arab opposition to the Italian occupation. It was well enough understood that many Arabs were asking themselves whether Italian sovereignty was not, after all, preferable to Turkish, and there was a touch of genius in the suggestion that but for the arrival of the Italians a preferable alternative might have been forthcoming.

It is no injustice to Italy to say that in the Tripolitan provinces, in many quarters at least, British or French occupation would have been welcomed in preference to the Italian. Italy was a newcomer in North Africa, handicapped by a generation of hesitating diplomacy and by the existence in Tunis of a proletariat which competed commercially with the Arab. On the other hand, while few will maintain that the French are popular among the Tunisian Arabs, or that British rule is as much appreciated in Egypt as it ought to be, the Arab of the North African littoral knows France and Britain as great powers, whose governments have brought prosperity to those who live under them. It appears to be a fact that during the first weeks of the war the tribes near the Tunis border were anxious to put themselves under French protection, while others had thoughts of appealing to the British Government. To look towards Britain for protection was no new idea to the Tripolitan Arab. Eighty years ago the British Consul in Tripoli, Colonel Warrington, had succeeded in impressing the Tripolitans with a unique respect and regard for his race and government, and in the last troubled days of Karamanli rule eyes were turned to Britain in the hope of help. A powerful deputation was actually on the point of asking the British Government to assume a protectorate over the country, when Turkey anticipated the move.

In a dozen ways the Italians were handicapped in their dealings with the native population, partly by their own errors of omission or commission, partly by prejudice and by other circumstances for which they were in no sense responsible. In Tripoli town itself, where all had seemed smooth going at first, an atmosphere of mutual suspicion clouded for some time the relations between the two races. Slowly the cloud dispersed. The Italians began to estimate the revolt of October 23 at its proper significance, and the Arabs in the town began to appreciate the difficulties of the Italian position at that time, and to realise that they might expect fair treatment.

The impression of weakness, which had been given during the first days of the occupation, had been partially removed by the stern repression of the revolt, but for six weeks afterwards the condition of the town remained very unsatisfactory. During the latter half of November firing from the roofs at night was still fairly frequent, several sentries were got rid of quietly, and it became evident that severe measures were still demanded. While it is probable that the change which subsequently became noticeable was primarily and mainly due to the advance upon Ain Zara, and the consequent retreat of the Turks from the neighbourhood of Tripoli, there is a possibility that the Arab attitude was influenced by the stern punishment meted out to fourteen men who were tried and condemned, on December 5, for complicity in the revolt of October 23. The men were tried by court-martial and received a scrupulously fair trial.<sup>1</sup> Ten of them were quite clearly implicated

<sup>1</sup> I followed the whole of the trial. The hearing of the evidence lasted nearly three hours, and the court took half an hour to consider its verdict. By a fortunate chance I was subsequently able to correct the conclusions of a German correspondent, who had been at the trial for about twenty minutes. Knowing neither Italian nor Arabic, he had somehow received

in the revolt, and, while there was less evidence to involve the others, the weight of testimony and their own preparations were alike against them. All were hanged before dawn on the following morning, and their bodies were left suspended till midday.

The effect of these executions certainly seemed to be salutary. As far as could be learned by inquiry, the terrible lesson was not resented by the Arabs, though it must have seemed a mystery to them that a man could be condemned to death on circumstantial evidence. They had been accustomed to the kindly Turkish practice which required two actual eye-witnesses to establish the crime of murder, and here were men condemned for killing, or trying to kill, whom none had seen to take life. They must inevitably have wondered at the processes of European law; on the other hand, a natural sense of justice probably induced them to acquiesce in its conclusions.

Among the difficulties which hampered the Italians during the early days of the occupation was the lack of efficient and trustworthy interpreters. There was a disposition, at first, to rely upon the Tripoli Jew as the medium of communication between Italian and Arab, and while the Tripoli Jews are a remarkable and worthy community, the class from which the interpreters were largely drawn did not supply the type of man that was wanted. The whole Jewish community welcomed the Italian occupation, but it is an unfortunate fact that a proportion of its lowlier members saw in the occupation, and in the part which they

an impression that the accused were prisoners who had been captured in the fighting round Ain Zara on the previous day. In this belief, he was meditating an indignant despatch on Italian methods of dealing with prisoners of war.

The incident furnishes an illuminating comment on the 'facts' of war correspondence.

were able to play, a chance of revenging themselves for numberless slights and injuries endured at Arab hands. The game was easy during the weeks which followed the revolt, when a mutual suspicion informed the minds of Italian and Arab. At that time cases of deliberate false interpreting, calculated to prejudice the authorities against individual Arabs or Arabs in general, were not altogether rare ; and many things were wrongly coloured. Fortunately, in matters of first-class importance the duty of translation was entrusted to Italian officers or to others whose integrity was above suspicion. Capital errors were thereby avoided ; but it is not too much to say that at one time the relations between the Italians and the Arab community were in danger of being most gravely prejudiced—they were considerably affected—by the perpetration and nourishment of misunderstandings that ought never to have arisen.

The employment of Tripoli Jews worked double mischief. In the first place, a number of them, quite naturally, used their position as a means of ‘getting some of their own back,’ sowing mischief between Italians and Arabs. In the second place, the quasi-confidential position occupied by these Jews, and the semblance of authority which it gave them, was regarded as an outrage by the Arabs. For in Tripoli the Jew is held in peculiar contempt, so much so that the Moslem women are careless if a Jew should see them unveiled. ‘A Jew is not a man,’ they say. Under such conditions it is clear that the employment of Jews on a large scale, in positions of trust and as the connecting-links between the Arabs and the Italians, was a very unfortunate error.

Happily, the error was realised, partly owing to some indiscreet expressions of triumph on the part of the Jews,

partly owing to the chance detection of some false translations, partly through a better apprehension of Arab feeling. The fear, at one time widely spread, that the despised Jew was to be exalted above the Arab who had scorned him, was successfully combated ; a quiet warning was addressed to the Jewish community, and some changes were made on the staff of interpreters. The question of interpreters was not easy of solution, for those who were qualified were almost all Jews, Levantines or Maltese ; and, but for the special disabilities that arose from the circumstances, the Jews were undoubtedly the best. A process of supervision and selection, accompanied by the overworking of those who could be trusted, soon led to a better condition of things, and the rapprochement between Italian and Arab, where such rapprochement could take place, was gradually confirmed.

In addition to the permanent population of Tripoli town, a population richer in admixture than any other in the province, there is always a floating crowd of strangers, temporarily resident, who for one reason or another have followed the caravan-routes up from the south. Blacks from Kano and Sokotu ; from Bornu, from Wadai, from all the Tchad districts ; blacks of all shades, from mere coffee-colour to the true, cold black that makes the others look only a warm brown ; Tubbus and a few Tuareg—the list could easily be extended. And on the outskirts of the town there are always Bedouin camps, crawling hives of nomads whom hunger drives in from the inhospitable steppes.

During the war these people naturally complicated the problem for the Italians. They had to be brought under some sort of surveillance, and the supreme filthiness of their camps could not be tolerated. At first the main

encampment lay just outside the walls, on the Gargaresh road, almost opposite the American Consulate. Anything more noisome could hardly be imagined, and the hand of the sanitary authorities came down heavily. Wooden barracks were hastily constructed, and when the wanderers were transferred their encampments were given to the flames.

The nomads, unwilling, were established in their new quarters, but when the *carabinieri* officer, who was charged with their supervision, came on his rounds next morning, the barracks were empty, and the neighbouring gardens were full of the desert people, placidly camping out. A sheikh came forward to explain. ‘We cannot live in a house,’ he said; ‘we must sleep under the stars.’

It was pointed out that the condition of their former encampments had made the move necessary, that for the present the nomads must be kept under strict observation, and that their new lodging was a vast improvement upon the precarious shelters of hide and straw that had served them before. The sheikh pondered, and then replied: ‘We shall obey your laws, and be no more unclean. And if any of us be unclean, or offend in any way, then let him be put in the house you have built.’

Upon consideration, the appeal was allowed. An ever-increasing encampment grew up near the empty barracks, and thanks to the vigorous efforts of the Red Cross workers it remained fairly clean. As time went on, women and children, and a certain number of men, came into the town from the hungry plains; and when peace was declared the population of the encampment was close upon seven thousand. All these people, and every one else in the town who made application and was found to be in want, received a daily ration from the Italian authorities, and as work

THE BEDUIN ENCAMPMENT ON THE OUTSKIRTS  
OF TRIPOLI



BEDUIN CHILDREN





was plentiful for all who could or would work, a mass of starving humanity was converted into a community that fed and grew fat and learned to laugh. Most pitiful of all had been the scared and wasted children, and to watch them after a month or two was a grateful sight ; plump and contented, playing in the dust, or besieging a knot of grinning soldiers, loudly importunate in their demands for alms, they seemed to furnish a clear omen of good for the future.

To the last the Turks persisted in the policy of fabrication they had so consistently pursued. When peace was duly signed between Turkey and Italy, and Neshat Bey had to give up the struggle and leave Tripoli, he announced to the Arabs that while the Turks had to leave the country, they left it to the Arabs, for the Italians also had agreed to go. His proclamation might have been a legacy of trouble, and as such it was doubtless meant, but after a period of comparative trust in the Turk the Arabs had re-learned suspicion. The lie delayed for a little the acceptance of Italian rule, but it had only half-imposed upon the Arab mind, and the moment of hesitation soon passed. Every tribute is due to the Turks for the bravery with which they faced a desperate situation, and the ability with which they trained and managed their unruly auxiliaries. A more general approbation of their methods would seem to depend upon the ability to disregard Western standards.

The penetration and occupation of Tripolitania is proceeding satisfactorily, and in Cyrenaica the pacification of the country is only a matter of time and of energy. Untoward incidents will take place—a resident was murdered at Tarhuna at the beginning of this year—but the prophecy may be ventured that before a long interval has elapsed

Italians and Arabs will be co-operating successfully in the revival and development of the country that now belongs to both. No one who has observed the devotion of the Eritrean Askaris to their officers will doubt the ability of Italians to win the attachment of 'natives,' and it is likely that the 'Arab' levies which have been raised already in various centres will do much to establish and maintain good relations.

The Turk has gone from North Africa, and his dominions are parcelled out among European powers. He will never return ; but with his final going, and with the promise that the good government and prosperity which follow in the wake of European rule will be extended to Tripoli, a breath has blown upon a smouldering spark that glows as yet but faintly, though one day it might fan to a flame. Among the dreamers of the world are some whose dreams are inspired by a memory of the days when Arab civilisation and Arab military power played great parts in Europe. The very blows that have shaken the Turkish Empire and, *pace* the scaremongers, discovered the limitations of the Panislamic movement, have made it possible to think of an Arab renaissance. The dream of Arab Nationalism is vague and nebulous enough, though some Arabs are prepared to enunciate a programme ; but it will lead in due course, one may be sure, to the formation of a Young Arab Party.



NATIVE LEVIES, BENGHAZI

*Photo Comerio, Milan*



## CHAPTER XIII

## THE FUTURE OF THE NEW COLONIES

THE average imagination can hardly fail to be struck by Italy's resumption of territories that formed a part of Roman Africa. It is the custom, in some critical quarters, to deny to modern Italy the proud descent from Imperial Rome which has been a natural inspiration to a reborn people; and, narrowly viewed, the denial has a sound enough basis. Ethnologically, no doubt, the modern Italians are far removed from the dominant people which founded and administered the greatest empire in history, and it may be the fact that of this race there are no true descendants. Yet, despite the admixture of foreign blood which gradually overwhelmed the original stock, the Roman tradition has inevitably persisted, and to admit the denial of Italian heirship would be to allow an unjustified predominance to the claims of strict heredity. In a sense, all nations have shared in the heritage of ancient Rome, but the legitimate heirs to its glories and traditions are those who, now weakened, now strengthened, by the infusion of alien blood, have occupied throughout the centuries the ancestral land.

The Tripolitan provinces are rich in Roman remains, and history is full of allusions to the productivity of regions that are now desolate. In Roman times the Tripolitan coast strip and the Cyrenaican plateau must have been veritable gardens, and to-day the memorials of a vanished

wealth are seen in the half-buried ruins of cities, and in the remnants of aqueducts and reservoirs. The ruins of Cyrene and the other cities of the Pentapolis have furnished Greek and Roman antiquities to the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> Broken columns, fragments of statuary, Roman coins and Roman pottery, are found in the gardens round Tripoli ; at Ain Zara and Gargaresh the spades that dug the first rough trenches laid bare mosaic pavements and vaulted tombs. Near Ajilat the ruins of Sabratha include an amphitheatre that held ten thousand spectators ;<sup>2</sup> and at Lebda the remains of Leptis Magna, third city of the Tripolitaine, recall the memory of Septimius Severus, the places of whose birth and death bear striking witness to the far-reaching sway of Rome. For the emperor who was born so near the southern rim of the known world ended his life at York, nearly two thousand miles to the north, but still within the limits of the empire he had ruled.

Along the Tripolitan coast the ruins of cities are strewn, and at the foot of the steep escarpment that drops from the upland plateau the remnants of ancient dams and reservoirs show how the desolate plains were once made to bear rich harvest. Even in Roman days the lack of permanent running water imposed upon the possessors of the country the obligation to conserve the rainfall by artificial means, and the task of 'reconstruction' (in the widest sense of the word) that awaits modern Italy is arduous in the extreme.

Throughout the whole of the two provinces there is no permanent river to water the country, and springs are few. The land is seamed by torrent-beds that in the rainy season

<sup>1</sup> The statues, etc., from Cyrenaica were collected by the expedition of Captain Smith and Commander Porcher in 1860-1.

<sup>2</sup> *La Tripolitaine d'hier et de demain*, H.-M. de Mathuisieux, p. 34.



*Photo W. F. Riley*

MOSAIC PAVEMENT FOUND AT AIN ZARA IN DIGGING TRENCHES



*Photo Captain Mola*

MARBLES FOUND NEAR EL HANNI



carry the flood waters to the sea, or till the thirsty, porous soil swallows them on their way to the coast. All through the dry months, for more than half the year, there is no water in the river-beds to make up for the lack of rain. Here and there, especially in Cyrenaica, there are springs and even streams (notably at Derna, where the waters of two streams are united to irrigate the gardens and fields, and supply the town); but, generally speaking, the sub-soil water is relied upon to make up for the deficiency of rainfall, and it is only where water is found comparatively near the surface that cultivation has persisted.

The cultivated area of Tripolitania proper may be divided into three separate zones: the line of oases that fringes the coast; the table-land whose northern edge runs from the Tunis border to Homs; and the scattered oases to the south, Ghadames, Derji, Sokna, Sella. As far as the third zone is concerned, the bare and stony deserts in which these last poor remnants of cultivation lie isolated can hold no possibility of betterment. Centuries of erosion have done their work completely, and it would seem that in this rocky desolation the very framework of the world emerges. It may conceivably be possible to increase the yield of the strips and pockets of soil that remain here and there throughout this vast and dreary expanse, but the reports of those few explorers who have traversed the country seem to preclude the prospect of any real extension of the cultivated area. All hopes of development must be concentrated on the two clearly differentiated districts lying north of the blank desert known as the Hammada-el-Homra: the coast plain that rises gently to the foot of the escarpment already mentioned, and the broken plateau that slopes very gradually to the south and east. In both these districts there is soil to be reclaimed, a wide extent of

abandoned land. They are not 'desert' in the popular sense of the word ; they are lands that centuries of ignorance and sloth and strife and oppression have allowed to go out of cultivation.

It would not be possible within the limits of a short chapter to cover all the ground necessary to a detailed estimate of the possibilities latent in Tripolitania. Moreover, the data are not available. Only a handful of travellers have penetrated to the interior of the country, and there has been no real scientific exploration. The majority of those who have visited the districts under discussion passed through them on their way to more distant goals, on which their eyes were firmly set, and only one recent traveller can claim to have made even a rough general survey of Tripolitania itself. In three successive journeys (in 1901, 1903, and 1904), M. de Mathuisieux succeeded in traversing, though not in exploring (and the difference is of prime importance), the more important districts of the coastal plains and the tableland that lies behind them. His researches were necessarily, and avowedly, limited in scope and range, and while the two books descriptive of his journeys, *A travers la Tripolitaine* and *La Tripolitaine d'hier et de demain*, are full of interest, and afford many valuable indications regarding the districts traversed, they are little more than the record of a hurried passage through a country that has been jealously and effectively guarded from proper investigation.

In the spring of 1911 an Italian expedition, under the leadership of Count Sforza and Signor Sanfilippo, set out to attempt a more thorough exploration of the regions which rumour had reported to be capable of development. The expedition was accompanied by a Turkish escort, and before long it became clear that any real freedom of

investigation would not be allowed. Various places were cut out of the programme of the expedition. The wishes of the leaders were turned aside with every politeness by the officer in command of the escort. The journey to such and such a place was unsafe owing to the predatory habits of the tribesmen. The officer was 'desolated,' but he was responsible for the safety of the expedition, etc., etc. Other places were not accessible at that time of year owing to difficulties of water and forage. The excuses varied, but the Italian expedition was as helpless as a personally-conducted tourist-party under the tyranny of its personal conductor. Formally marshalled and guided, its members toured along the tracks marked out for them, and the loitering necessary to exploration was strongly discouraged. Attempts to enter into communication with Arabs were equally frowned upon, and the expedition was limited to a general conspectus of the country through which it passed. It had started with the idea of prospecting for minerals as well as studying agricultural possibilities, for Arabs have brought many stories of mineral wealth into Tripoli. Deposits of phosphates in the Jebel, sulphur in the Sirt district, coal, iron, silver, and even oil in the unexplored districts to the south—the mouth of rumour has pronounced them all; and it was hoped that the expedition might be able to gain some particular information about the less fanciful suggestions. Owing to the last desperate effort of the Turkish authorities to guard the *vilayet* from European enterprise, any attempts to establish the truth or falsehood of these reports was frustrated, and the San-filippo-Sforza expedition, like other travellers, had to rest content with general impressions.

When the war broke out, the members of the expedition were at Sokna, and for reasons which are not clear the Turks

chose to regard them as prisoners of war. They were taken to Murzuk, in the Fezzan, and after remaining there for months they were brought north again to the Jebel, where they were kept until the conclusion of peace. The captivity they suffered seems to have been little more rigorous than the strict surveillance exercised during their journeys as free men, and the forced extension of their programme resulted in a considerable addition to the sum of their impressions. Instead of passing through a district with a caravan, by their long sojourns they learned the life of the place where they lived and watched the effect of the changing seasons. While such knowledge as they acquired of the country still comes under the category of 'impressions,' yet it is almost inevitable that their impressions should be at once deeper and more accurate than those of any previous observers.

No detailed account of these impressions has so far been published,<sup>1</sup> but this much is known: that the members of the expedition are convinced of the agricultural resources which await development. The observations which they were able to make during their travels all led to the same conclusion: that the application of proper methods would reclaim and develop an immense area of land, which the ignorance and sloth of the inhabitants, coupled with the extortions of the Turkish government, have left in a condition of complete or partial abandonment. In common with other observers, they find in the northern and eastern parts of the high plateau the greatest agricultural possibilities, and the Gharian, Orfella, and Msellata districts appear to offer the most immediate prospects to intelligent enterprise.

<sup>1</sup> Most of the notes and papers belonging to the expedition were destroyed by the Turks, but the recently formed *Società Italiana per lo studio della Libia* will publish shortly a volume based upon Count Sforza's diary.

The considered opinion of M. de Mathuisieulx points in the same direction, but in connection with this opinion there are points which seem worthy of special notice. As the result of his first journey in Tripolitania, M. de Mathuisieulx came to the most pessimistic conclusions regarding the possibility of future development. From his later journeys he drew different deductions ; and, while he still denied a future to the low-lying parts of the country, he formed a markedly favourable judgment as to the possibilities latent in the upland regions. In the preface to his second volume on Tripoli—*La Tripolitaine d'hier et de demain*—he writes : ‘ J'avais raison de dire naguère que les terres basses sont vouées à une aridité absolue ; je n'ai pas moins raison aujourd'hui, après quatre nouveaux voyages et l'exploration complète de ces territoires, de certifier que les hauts plateaux nous avaient caché jusqu'ici les témoignages de leur valeur, très réelle et digne d'éveiller des espérances sérieuses.’

M. de Mathuisieulx is perfectly frank in explaining his recantation of the sweeping condemnation which he had passed upon the prospects of the Tripolitaine. His first opinion was founded upon insufficient data, and further investigation caused him to alter it. The fact is instructive, and the lesson to be drawn may be that the possibilities of the country are not yet fully gauged. It is readily conceivable that further knowledge might lead to a revision of the condemnation passed upon the coastal plains, and the general possibility becomes a probability when the main basis of M. de Mathuisieulx's judgment is considered. He finds his favourable opinion of the upland regions, apart from their obvious possibilities, upon ‘ la découverte de traces romaines insoupçonnées, qui affirment les succès des colons anciens,’ and sustains his

view of the low-lying country in the following words : 'La preuve que la Djeffara n'est pas susceptible de produire grand'chose, c'est qu'on n'y trouve aucune trace de l'exploitation romaine, si intense partout où il y avait la possibilité de réussir.'

In point of fact, the assumption that there are no Roman remains in the Jefara district was made too hastily. It is natural that in this plain of alluvial formation the remains of an ancient occupation should be less easily discoverable than in the eroded uplands, and the comparatively insignificant vestiges of the three important cities which gave the country its name would seem to demonstrate the unlikelihood that traces of a mere agricultural occupation should survive aboveground. If the sites of proud cities are only vaguely discernible, it is scarcely to be expected that the relics of a bygone country life, however prosperous, should be readily visible to the passing traveller.

Yet they lie buried here and there. To the south of Tripoli, at a considerable distance, olive-presses have been found, and it is not reasonable to suppose that these presses were placed in the middle of the desert to crush olives brought from the hills or from the oases of the littoral. There are stories of other remains scattered over the plain, and though these have not yet been confirmed, there seems no good reason to doubt their authenticity. The ruined barrages which are known to exist at the foot of the ravines that cut the northern escarpment are in themselves sufficient proof of a vanished cultivation in the plains.

To labour the point further is unnecessary, for the argument from antiquity is frequently met by the round assertion that the climate and general conditions have changed so much in fifteen centuries that what may once have been

a garden is now, beyond question, an irreclaimable desert. Roughly speaking, this pessimistic conclusion may be said to have found general acceptance in France and England, while Germany and Italy have leaned to the other extreme. The habit of hasty generalisation has found remarkable expression on various occasions, but perhaps the pre-eminent instance is that of the judgment published by an English war-correspondent, who, after three weeks in the town of Tripoli, in an area bounded by Fort B, Bu Meliana, and the Italian lines in the oasis, declared that from what he had seen of the country it was worth nothing at all.

What the country really is worth will not be evident until some years of exploration and effort have passed, but there are certain ascertainable facts, and a number of probabilities, upon which it may be permitted to hazard an opinion.

In the first place, the northern half of Tripolitania is not a rainless desert of sand. Perhaps an apology is due for insistence upon the fact, but misapprehensions on the subject are widespread, and it is really necessary to explain that the country in question is not a replica of the Nubian Desert minus the Nile. The floor of the plain that lies between the Jebel and the sea is for the most part soil, not sand, and the rainfall is considerable, though the dry season is long and scorching.

The Tripolitan coast for the greater part of its long extent is fringed with a belt of sand-dunes, and the plains that lie behind are streaked by similar zones of moving sand. But according to such information as I was able to gather in Tripoli, the greater part of the so-called desert consists of a soil that only awaits intelligent cultivation and irrigation to make it bear ample harvest. The soil of the 'desert' is for the most part the soil of the oases, and it can be made

to yield approximately equal results by the application of energy and skill.

The oases that lie along the coast owe their existence, or it may be more accurate to say their survival, to the fact that water is found everywhere, in the narrow strip that is cultivated, lying close beneath the surface. As the level of the plain rises from the sea to the Jebel, the layer of water becomes harder to reach, and intensive cultivation ceases, giving way to the pastures and scattered fields of grain that are dependent solely upon the rainfall, or to an aridity that bears no crops. As the foot of the escarpment is approached, cultivation is resumed in places, where the torrent beds carry the winter rains for a few miles before they sink through the porous soil. Wherever the plains can be watered they are capable of giving an abundant yield, and the problem that faces Italy resolves itself, practically speaking, into the collection and utilisation of an adequate water-supply.

The average rainfall in Tripoli town, for the period 1892-1910, was measured to be 420·4 millimetres, or slightly over 16·5 inches, the worst year recorded being 1895, in which the rainfall totalled only 214·2 millimetres, or 8·5 inches. But in the previous year nearly 29 inches of rain had fallen, and in point of fact the rainy season 1894-5 gave a fall of 512·4 millimetres (20 inches), while during the following winter the figures were 486·2 millimetres (more than 19 inches). On the other hand, the number of days on which a measurable quantity of rain falls is low, averaging fifty-one, and the distribution of the rainfall is unsatisfactory. Generally speaking, the rainfall is distributed only over the six months October to March (though heavy falls have been recorded in September and May), and the



IN THE JEFARA—SOIL NOT SAND



IN THE JEFARA—A SANDY BELT



true rainy season extends only from November to February.<sup>1</sup> While the actual rainfall is roughly the same as that of Foggia (mm. 446·7) and not very much inferior to that of Girgenti (mm. 460) and Trapani (mm. 502), the period of actual drought in Apulia and Sicily is very much shorter. It follows that a successful development of tracts that are now desert must depend upon the collection and control of the winter rains by means of barrages and irrigation works, and upon the possibility of supplementing this supply by tapping the subterranean layer of water that is at present only utilised in the coast oases and along the caravan routes. While the rainfall in the Jebel is supposed to be considerably heavier than at Tripoli, the storage of rain water is only a part of the problem that awaits Italian engineers ; the future of the country seems to depend in an even greater degree upon a system of irrigation based upon wells.

Fortunately it seems probable that water can be readily obtained throughout the greater part of the Jefara district. At present the primitive means at the disposal of the Arabs have prevented any adequate utilisation of the water-supply, and the invincible sloth and obstinacy of the Turks was a bar to any enterprise calculated to improve the conditions. A typical instance of the Turkish attitude is afforded by the fate of a scheme for bringing water from Ain Zara to Tripoli. It was pointed out to the authorities that the simplest method would be to follow the depression, or wady, which finds its way to Tripoli by a slightly devious route, where traces of ancient conduits exist. The authorities replied that the orders from Constantinople

<sup>1</sup> The facts and figures are taken from a pamphlet published by the Colonial Department of the Italian Foreign Office—‘Climatologia di Tripoli e Bengasi,’ by Professor Filippo Eredia.

indicated the shortest possible route, and that no modification could be adopted. As the direct route traverses some low ridges of solid rock, the 'engineers' entrusted with the work were soon at a standstill. No tools in Tripoli could attempt to deal with the rock, and no others were provided. The enterprise was simply dropped, without any real attempt to overcome the difficulties of the chosen route, or any consideration of the obvious alternative.

With the facilities for boring that modern science provides, the whole face of the country should be changed, and it may be worth while to emphasise the fact that Italian engineers are peculiarly skilful. The subterranean waters are so far practically unexplored, but it seems to be generally supposed that they are not solely, or mainly, dependent for replenishment upon the percolation of the rainfall in Tripolitania. M. de Mathuisieux writes : 'Le débit des ouadi des hautes terres est trop minime pour qu'on lui attribue l'alimentation de cette nappe. Peut-être faut-il y voir une infiltration très lointaine, provenant du Soudan même, par la pente de strates (imperméables et sous-jacentes) vers la mer. En tout cas, les pluies tombées sur le Nefoussa et le Gariana, c'est-à-dire sur l'étroite bordure septentrionale qui penche vers le Nord, ne peuvent fournir une pareille quantité d'eau souterraine.' The theory of a distant origin for the subsoil waters seems to have many adherents, and the supposition that there is not only a subterranean deposit, but a subterranean flow, has recently received striking confirmation. Sinking a well on the outskirts of Tripoli, not far from the Bread Market, the Italians came upon an underground stream which gives a considerable and constant flow. The presence of subterranean streams had long been suspected ;



DERNA—A GENERAL VIEW

*Photo Comerio, Milan*



and it is only reasonable to anticipate further discoveries of the same kind.

The suggestion is sometimes made that the expense of raising the water to the surface will be so great as to render an economic development of the country impossible, even assuming its potential fertility. This seems hardly likely, for though the general attitude of Nature is determinedly hostile to human enterprise, the wind that blows across the plains is on the side of man. It is confidently anticipated, by those who are acquainted with the conditions, that by means of wind-wheels the task of bringing the water to the surface may be easily and cheaply accomplished. Wind is a feature of the Tripolitan climate, and in the dry season the breeze off the sea blows with an almost clock-work regularity during the afternoon hours, except when its cooling breath is replaced by the furnace blast of the *ghibli*, which will atone for its extreme unpleasantness if it helps to bring water to the thirsty soil.

In a consular report published by the Italian Foreign office in 1904 ('Il Vilayet di Tripoli in Barberia nell' anno 1902') the cultivable area of Tripolitania and the Fezzan is calculated at nearly four hundred thousand square kilometres, while the area actually under cultivation is estimated at less than a sixth of this total. It may be that these figures indicate a prospect of development that is exaggerated, but even allowing for exaggeration, an immense extension of prosperity seems sure to result from the adoption of reasonably modern methods. The chief products of the regions already under cultivation of a kind are dates, cereals and olive oil ; and the vine, which is little cultivated owing to the embargo placed by the Koran upon the juice of the grape, has borne remarkable fruit in the few cases where it has been planted and tended. In the gardens of the oases all kinds of fruit-

trees flourish, fig, pear, apple, peach, apricot, plum, almond, orange, and lemon, while the mulberry holds out a promise of silk-worm culture. Fruit-farming will doubtless develop in time, but it appears to be the general opinion that for the present efforts will be specially concentrated upon the production of dates,<sup>1</sup> olives and cereals, especially barley. A pamphlet published by the Italian Foreign Office<sup>2</sup> indicates the cultivation of sisal as likely to give good results, and is even hopeful regarding the introduction of cotton. Experiments in Sicily have produced hybrid plants which are of quick growth and show a remarkable resistance to drought, and it is suggested that similar results might be obtained in Tripolitania.

For more than forty years Tripoli has exported a considerable quantity of esparto-grass, the greater part of which is sent to England, to be used in the manufacture of paper. Unfortunately the methods employed by the Arabs in harvesting this natural product have been ruinously destructive. To begin with, the grass was collected near Tripoli, Homs and Sliten, but the practice of making a clean sweep of young shoots as well as mature grass, and of tearing it up by the roots wholesale, ended in the disappearance of the plant from these districts. It still exists in quantity in the hills, and it is to be hoped that the Italian authorities may be able to inculcate less wasteful methods of collecting the grass, and, further, may succeed in substituting a cultivation for what has hitherto been merely a spoliation.

The Cyrenaican plateau is even less known to the world than Tripolitania, but those who have travelled there are

<sup>1</sup> The date groves of the coast strip in particular should be capable of an immense extension. The long period which elapses before a date-palm comes to maturity is more than compensated by the eventual yield.

*Monografie e Rapporti Coloniali*, No. 8, March 1912.

almost unanimous in agreeing that its resources are capable of great development under a régime less devastating than the successive Arab and Turkish occupations which have brought so low a district once famed for its riches. The cities of the ancient Pentapolis—Cyrene, Apollonia, Ptolemais, Arsinoe and Berenice—are replaced by a few miserable townlets. The Garden of the Hesperides, whose fabled site is placed by some authorities in the neighbourhood of Benghazi, has shared the common fate that overtook the whole country. Though even the waters of Lethe have failed, the past is blotted out in the land where they once flowed.

Cyrenaica is sunk in decay, yet even so it is far less desolate in aspect than the arid expanse of the Tripolitan Jefara, or the bare slopes of Jebel Tarhuna. The plateau of Barca is still sufficiently clothed with verdure to merit its Arab name of Jebel-el-Akhdar, the Green Mountain. Pastures and woods alternate with centres of intensive cultivation, and here and there perennial springs are found. The vegetation is, generally speaking, more typically 'Mediterranean' in character than that of Tripolitania, and has a close affinity with that of Sicily.<sup>1</sup> Woods of cypress, juniper, and ilex lend a beauty to the landscape, and the sides of the wadys are clothed with myrtles and oleanders.

Even those travellers who have doubted the value of Tripolitania have been favourably impressed by the appearance of Cyrenaica, and while some have rhapsodised in language that seems to spring from hope rather than from judgment, nearly all of the small band who have traversed the uplands within the last forty years, from Rohlfs to

<sup>1</sup> 'Dati Statistici Riassuntivi sulla Flora della Libia' (*Monografie e Rapporti Coloniali*, No. 7).

de Mathuisieulx and the later Italian travellers, have recorded their conviction of a great potential fertility. On the other hand, the expedition despatched in the summer of 1908 by the Jewish Territorial Organisation, with the object of studying the possibilities of a Jewish agricultural settlement in Cyrenaica, brought back a very unfavourable report. In their fifteen days' journey the expedition examined twelve springs and a considerable number of wells, and they came to the conclusion that the scarcity of water would prevent the agricultural development which other explorers had thought possible. The report, written by Dr. J. W. Gregory,<sup>1</sup> explains that the geological formation of the Cyrenaican plateau accounts fully for this lack of water. The rain-water drains through the limestone rock as through a sieve until it reaches the sea-level, and it is only in isolated beds of marl that the moisture is retained. The report is sufficiently discouraging, but it is permissible to suggest that a fifteen days' journey may have given too little opportunity to gauge the resources of the country. The rainfall of Cyrenaica has not been adequately ascertained, and while the average at Benghazi, according to observations taken at the French Consulate, is little over eleven inches, the estimate for the Barca plateau is generally put at nearly double that figure.<sup>2</sup>

The future development of the country will probably be on the same lines as those indicated for Tripolitania, with this difference, that the date will play a less important part, while the prospects of the olive and the vine seem on the whole to be more favourable. At Derna and a few

<sup>1</sup> 'Report of the work of the Commission to examine the Territory proposed for the purpose of a Jewish settlement in Cyrenaica.' Ito Offices, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> 'Climatologia di Tripoli e Bengasi,' by Professor Filippo Eredia (*Mongrafie e Rapporti Coloniali*, No. 4, February 1912).

other places the banana has been successfully cultivated, but it is unlikely that the area of production can be much extended.

It may be that the expectations of Italy are too optimistic, but the results obtained by the most modern systems of 'dry-farming'<sup>1</sup> should impose a hesitation upon those who are inclined to ridicule the conversion of the desert into a garden. Time and money and hard work are all necessary to the success of the enterprise which Italy has undertaken. Money will be the chief difficulty, but if Italian prosperity continues to develop at the remarkable rate of the last decade, this obstacle should disappear before many years have passed, and in the interval foreign capital might find it worth while to supply the deficiency. Skill and hard work will not be wanting. The Italian is accustomed to dealing with difficulties of drought, and agricultural engineering is thoroughly understood in Italy. Moreover, Italy can bring to the development of her new colonies an ample supply of the patient and cheerful labour which has helped to build up the wealth of many countries.

The future prosperity of the new colonies will almost certainly depend upon a hard-won agricultural development, but it is at least conceivable that some mineral wealth may lie concealed in the almost unexplored territories of the Tripolitan plateau or in the waste lands that lie to the south of the Great Syrtis. Stories of phosphates deposits are persistent. The experience of Tunis encourages the hope that these may be found in the Jebel, and a small deposit has already been discovered not far from Homs. Sulphur is known to exist in some quantity not far from the shores of the Syrtis (the Arabs call the district the Bay

<sup>1</sup> The results obtained in Western Kansas are particularly worthy of note.

of Sulphur), but the prospects of opening up a lucrative trade can only be settled by a thorough, skilled investigation of these 'mines.' Other mineral wealth may exist, but no reliance can be placed upon the stories which have been circulated on the strength of Arab rumour.

Some Italian writers have expressed a belief in the possibility of reviving the decadent caravan-trade with the interior, which in the old days brought wealth to Tripoli; but there is an increasing tendency to recognise the fact that the altered conditions in the countries which lie south of the Sahara have dealt a fatal blow at this ancient commerce. The attempt has been made to attribute the decadence of the caravan-trade to the appalling depredations of Rabeh,<sup>1</sup> whose wholesale massacres depopulated Bornu and incidentally left the Tripoli-Murzuk-Bilma route without a commercial terminus. Undoubtedly, the bloody incursions of Rabeh hastened the decay of the trade, but a disabling blow was struck when the most lucrative article of commerce, the slave, could no longer find open market in Tripoli; and its doom has been sealed by the Anglo-French partition and development of the countries which used to be tapped by the Tripolitan caravan-routes.

In former days a combination of circumstances forced the countries south of the Great Desert into an artificial dependence upon the caravan-routes. The commercial enterprise of the Arabs and the existence of the camel opened an outlet to the north, while the lack of animal transport, and a dense barrier compact of hostile man and no less hostile nature, blocked a far shorter route to the sea.

<sup>1</sup> A Sudanese adventurer, half-negro and half-Arab, ex-slave and follower of Zobeir Pasha, who broke loose from the welter of confusion and massacre which followed the downfall of the Egyptian régime, pushed westward, and carved out a kingdom for himself on the shores of Lake Tchad.

Geographically speaking, Bornu and the Haussa States belong to the hinterland of the Gulf of Guinea. Politically and commercially, they remained for centuries in the hinterland of the Barbary States, and only now, with the opening up of the Nigerian railway system, is their natural outlet becoming available. From Tripoli to Kano the average freight for each ton of merchandise is calculated at about six hundred francs,<sup>1</sup> while from Liverpool to Kano, via Lagos, the charges amount to about a fifth of this sum. Even the construction of a trans-Saharan railway could scarcely serve to prevent the diversion of the Kano trade to the south, for the distance from Kano to Lagos is only about a third of that from Kano to Tripoli. The interior trade of Tripoli may develop with the development of the Fezzan, and with the reclamation of the French Sahara, but the historic commercial connection with Bornu and the Haussa States can hardly survive the inexorable pressure of the new conditions.

This chapter has looked far ahead, beyond the immediate difficulties of the moment, beyond the first obstacle which lies in the way of a future prosperity. The first step towards the regeneration of the country must obviously be the establishment of satisfactory relations between the governing power and the native peoples. Without the assurance of law and order no wide economic development is possible. There is no doubt about the ability of the Italians to secure the necessary result, but it is to be feared that they have handicapped themselves unduly by a failure to gauge some of the essential qualities of the native mind. Stress has already been laid upon the lack of sufficient attention to the question of prestige which characterised the policy pursued during the campaign. This mistake was bound

<sup>1</sup> 'Il Vilayet di Tripoli di Barberia nell' anno 1902' (consular report), p. 120.

to render the occupation more difficult, and its effects are manifest now ; but a further handicap upon a satisfactory development of the country was imposed by the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne.

A noteworthy feature of the negotiations which passed between Italy and Turkey, directly and indirectly, was the unswerving adherence of the Italian Government to a strictly limited demand. Italy's terms were indicated early in the war ; they were definitely formulated in the spring of 1912 ; and they remained the same throughout the protracted pourparlers of the summer. From the beginning Italy postulated, as the essential feature of the settlement, her complete and absolute sovereignty over the two Tripolitan provinces. This granted, she was willing to recognise the spiritual claims of the Caliphate, and to save Turkish *amour propre* in any way compatible with her own definite sovereignty. An obvious criticism is that while such terms were reasonable enough when they were first formulated, Turkey's obstinate refusal to consider them, and the subsequent progress of Italian arms, would have warranted an increase in the demands of the Italian Government. At the same time there is something admirable in the attitude which refused to bargain ; which tabled Italian terms at the outset, and declined with equal firmness all pressure to abate what was considered essential and all temptation to raise the price.

The Italian Government and the majority of the Italian people believe that the Treaty of Lausanne fully secures the object for which the war was made, complete Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. As far as Europe is concerned this end has certainly been attained ; Europe has recognised the Italian annexation of the two provinces, and nothing appears to be left of the Sultan's

power save the exercise of religious functions attaching to the Caliphate. On the other hand, there is a considerable body of Italian opinion which doubts whether this divorce of temporal and spiritual power will be justly apprehended by the native populations, and there is reason to fear that the terms of the treaty may put certain obstacles in the way of the new colonial administration.

The recognition of the Sultan's spiritual power, as evidenced by the right reserved to Constantinople to nominate a chief Cadi, who in turn will nominate his subordinates, and by the clause which provides for the continuance of the public prayers for the Sultan,<sup>1</sup> would by itself have been a fruitful source of misunderstanding and trouble. The necessity of a direct religious connection between Constantinople and Tripoli is not evident, when it is remembered that while the Turks are Hanafis, the Tripolitan Arabs are Malikis. The intimate association of religious and political rights which exists in the Arab mind is likely to suggest that the Sultan's temporal power is only partly in abeyance—a belief which will be sedulously fostered by his nominees ; and the situation is further compromised by the clause which provides for the appointment of a Representative of the Sultan (Naib-ul-Sultan), 'to protect Ottoman interests' in Tripolitania. This official's salary is to be paid by the local exchequer, and there will be some excuse for the Tripolitan Arabs if they come to the conclusion that the war has resulted in the arrangement of a *condominium* between Italy and Turkey. It may have been necessary,

<sup>1</sup> This clause seems the more unfortunate, as the religious authorities in Tripoli town had of their own accord decided to discontinue the prayer for the Sultan, as soon as they perceived that the Italians respected their religion. The restoration of the Sultan's name to the official prayers cannot fail to encourage the opinion that he still retains a share of temporal sovereignty.

or it may have been thought advisable, to admit an official connection between Tripoli and Constantinople, but the channels by which this connection is assured are such as to give ample scope for the pulling of wires and strings to the detriment of Italian interests.

There is no doubt that the difficulties inherent in the situation created by the Treaty of Lausanne will eventually be overcome, but it seems unfortunate that the ground was not cleared once for all when the opportunity offered. It is not a question of substance and shadow. With the departure of the Turks from Tripolitania their shortcomings are likely to be forgotten, and the Arabs who suffered under the Sultan's administration may regard him differently in his capacity of Caliph and Padishah.

The problems, economic and political, which confront the Italian authorities will demand years of patient effort before they are solved. But Italy is not likely to be daunted by slow progress or periodic set-backs. The nation will give of its best to assure the success of the new enterprise, and it may be permitted to one who has had much opportunity of observing and admiring the national growth to express a firm confidence in the result.

## CHAPTER XIV

## ITALY AND THE POWERS

SOME mention has already been made, in the first chapter of this book, of the critical attitude adopted by public opinion in Europe towards the Italian occupation of Tripoli. The reasons which seem to have inspired this attitude have been roughly outlined ; it remains to indicate the effect which such a widespread disapproval exercised upon Italy, upon the Italians as a people, and upon their relations with the other European Powers.

The ultimate effect upon the Italian people has certainly been beneficial, for the sense of isolation braced them to a new self-reliance. During the earlier stages of the war there was a distinct tendency in some quarters to complain of the lack of support given to the Tripoli enterprise, and the suggestion was sometimes heard that the Powers ought to intervene to terminate a useless resistance on the part of Turkey. The suggestion was a not unnatural outcome of the feeling that Italian action was greatly hampered by an enforced consideration of other people's interests. It was argued, with some show of justice, that if the Powers imposed a limit upon Italian operations, they might fairly exert pressure upon Turkey to accept the inevitable. But the roots of this attitude lay deeper. Italy had not been accustomed to stand alone.

As time went on, opinion hardened. Some writers and politicians still spoke bitterly, and unreasonably, of the

'cold neutrality' preserved by foreign Governments; but the best minds in Italy, while justly resenting unfair attacks in the European press, appreciated fully the obligations imposed upon the Powers, and realised that the isolation in which Italy found herself was in fact a national opportunity. By the end of the war it was generally recognised that Italy had gained far more by doing her own work in her own way, even at a greatly increased cost in money and lives, than if she had been helped to a solution by the intervention of allies or friends. Even the lack of moral support which had deeply wounded Italian feeling was seen to have had a unifying and stimulating effect upon the nation.

On the other hand, the consciousness of hostile criticism engendered among a large proportion of Italians an excess of suspicion which seemed to cloud their view of international relations. In a natural resentment against the unsympathetic or frankly inimical tone of so many foreign comments, they believed that these press criticisms gave a faithful reflection of official opinion, and they grew to suspect the existence of active political machinations in favour of the Turk, in quarters where such movements were never contemplated. The transition from just resentment to unfounded suspicion was fatally easy; and Italian opinion was further embittered against nations whose friendship had seemed to it already suspect.

When Italy made her unexpected descent upon Tripoli, there was a general feeling throughout the country that the sharpest criticisms would be directed against the enterprise by Germany and Austria, and that France, in spite of the formal recognition of Italian interests which had been secured in 1902, might look coldly upon the translation of a remote lien into an actual sovereignty. The opposition of German opinion was fully discounted beforehand. What-

ever the precise designs of German policy may have been (and there is little chance of their being fathomed now or in the immediate future), Tripoli had been the object of powerful private ambitions, and the frustration of these 'unofficial' hopes was bound to be unwelcome. Moreover, the action of Italy put Germany in the most uncomfortable position. For years it had been the object of German diplomacy at Constantinople to foster the idea that Turkish interests were safest under German tutelage, that German support could be counted on in the event of undue pressure from other Powers, that, briefly, Codlin was Turkey's friend, and not Short. In any case, it was not at all to the liking of the northern members of the Triple Alliance that Italy should display such an unexpected spirit of independence. The history of the Algeciras Conference might have made it clear that Italy had begun to have ideas of her own regarding her position in the Alliance, but it was no doubt hoped that such a deplorable demonstration of regard for her own interests might not readily be repeated. Everything considered, Italy's declaration of war upon Turkey was bound to awake extreme ill-humour in Germany, and there is no doubt that Italian opinion expected nothing else.

As far as Austria was concerned, Italy was equally free from illusions. It would be difficult to think of any enterprise, not directly favourable to Austrian interests, for which Italy would expect to have Austrian sympathy; and a war between Italy and Turkey distinctly threatened to ripen problems which Austria was not ready to tackle. Austria is reported to have been emphatic, even peremptory, regarding the localisation of hostilities, and the speedy withdrawal of the Italians from the coast of Epirus, after the Duke of the Abruzzi's action at Prevesa, sufficiently indicates the attitude of the allied nation. But this attitude,

and the venomous criticism of the Austrian press, came as no surprise to Italian opinion.

Nor was any cordiality expected from France, at any rate from French public opinion. The official acquiescence of France was assured, and mention has already been made of a rumour which credited the French Government with more than acquiescence in Italian action. But even after the agreement of 1902, French writers had continued to maintain that Ghadames and Ghat more properly belonged to the hinterland of Tunis than to Tripolitania, and the fear of French encroachments upon what was considered an Italian inheritance had been a constant preoccupation of the Italian 'colonial party.' It was realised further that whatever French designs upon the western frontier may have been, an Italian occupation of Tripolitania would greatly lessen, if it did not finally destroy, the hopes long cherished by the French of making a Tunisian port the outlet for the caravan trade that passed through Ghadames. Another definite ground for French criticism was easy to find in the repercussion which the Italian occupation of Tripoli was bound to cause among the Tunisian Arabs; but the real and decisive reason for the expectation of French coolness may be found in the imperfect sympathy that persists between the two 'Latin sisters.' In spite of the gradual rapprochement which had taken place since the beginning of the century, Italian distrust of France and French distrust of Italy had never been laid to rest, and the fact was amply proved within four months of the declaration of war, when the capture and detention of the French steamers *Carthage* and *Manouba* provoked a crisis that could hardly have occurred if a real confidence had existed between the two nations.

Germany, Austria, and France were counted potentially,

even probably, hostile by Italian opinion ; but it seems to be beyond doubt that England was generally expected to look favourably upon the occupation of Tripoli. Such an expectation was perhaps shortsighted. England, like the rest of Europe, was in no mood for further crises, and the feeling was widespread that—to quote Lord Salisbury's words again—‘an attack on Tripoli by Italy would be the signal for the dismemberment of Turkey.’ The Great Powers were no more prepared to tackle the question of Turkey in Europe than they had been twenty years earlier, when Lord Salisbury counselled Crispi to have patience, but in the interval the Balkan States had been growing and making ready, and there was a recognition, in some quarters at least, that the situation had become more inflammable. Moreover, England had special reasons for viewing with some misgiving an enterprise which was likely to send a wave of unrest throughout the Mohammedan world. In point of fact, the Italian descent upon Tripoli seems to have had far less effect upon the great mass of Islam than might reasonably have been expected. In Northern Nigeria, which from its long and intimate connection with Tripoli might have been thought to be specially susceptible to the looked-for spread of ill-humour, the Mohammedan population remained indifferent to the events of the war. In the French Sudan a general unconcern prevailed, though some few warriors came from French territory to fight for the Prophet and for promised loot, and the turmoil among the Arabs of Tunis was far more ‘Arab’ than ‘Mohammedan’ in its character. Egypt suffered an agitation similar to that in Tunis, and Egyptian sympathisers were of considerable assistance to the Turkish resistance in Cyrenaica. Public meetings of Indian Moslems sent messages of protest to London, expressing a natural indignation at what they

regarded as an unprovoked attack upon the titular head of Islam. But on the whole the reaction of the Tripoli enterprise upon the general body of Mohammedan opinion was unexpectedly slight. It may well be that the deposition of Abdul Hamid, and the substitution of a sovereign who is in fact the nominee of a political caucus not by any means exclusively Moslem, had cooled that attachment to the Caliphate which was necessarily the animating principle of the Pan-Islamic movement. The policy of Ottoman predominance pursued by the Committee of Union and Progress was not calculated to generate enthusiasm among the non-Turkish races of Islam. Still, the effect of a sudden descent upon Tripoli was a natural and legitimate preoccupation to England, and there is reason for surprise that this factor in the situation was not fully reckoned with by Italian opinion.

On the other hand, Italy had some cause to hope for British sympathy. England had expressly recognised Italian rights in Tripolitania, and the friendship between the two countries seemed almost the sole constant factor in European politics. In spite of the fact that the grouping of European Powers placed them on opposite sides, a recognition of certain common interests, and above all a persistent tradition of cordial sympathy, had bridged the gulf supposed to yawn between Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, and it used to be almost an axiom in international politics that England and Italy could not face one another in a European war.

The coolness, to use no stronger word, of much British comment upon the Tripolitan enterprise was a grievous disappointment to Italy. The greater part of the British press displayed a surprising ignorance of a question which had received full discussion in Italy during the summer months of 1911, and it is not to the credit of the foreign departments

of most newspapers that the Italian Embassy in London was besieged by journalists who were anxious to know what possible grievances Italy could urge against Turkey. It was to meet inquiries of this sort, in the belief common among Italians that the Anglo-Saxon mind can only find satisfaction in the most definite of concrete facts, that the Italian Government published a list of grievances against the Porte ; but their list assumed a general knowledge of the Tripoli question which did not exist in England, and this limited statement of the Italian case failed in consequence to carry conviction. A better understanding of the whole Tripolitan question would surely have led to fairer comment, and made clear to Italy that British opinion can appreciate broad grounds for action as well as tabulated causes of offence. We have ourselves taken up arms on the broadest of grounds ; we have fought long wars for ‘ suzerainty ’ or ‘ the balance of power,’ or, rather, for the ideas which underlay these doctrines. Is it really the fact that we are unable to recognise a similar necessity in the case of others ?

In the ordinary course of events, the disappointment and resentment caused by British criticism of Italian policy would hardly have lasted long enough seriously to cloud the cordiality of Anglo-Italian relations. Italy would have recognised that the difficulties of the European situation and the relation of England to Islam afforded a sufficient reason for the lack of enthusiasm displayed by British opinion. England, on the other hand, might have discovered, after the first shock, that Italy had compelling and adequate reasons for occupying Tripoli, and that it was not altogether fair to condemn an enterprise because it jarred the shaken nerves of Europe. Moreover, the simple fact might have become evident that the Italian occupation had

prevented Tripoli from developing into a field for international jealousy ; for Tripoli was in a fair way to become a second Morocco. A speedy readjustment of opinion might reasonably have been expected, if the situation had not been so lamentably prejudiced by the wholesale calumnies levelled at the Italian Army.

Some of these libels, so lightly flashed along the wires or scribbled in hasty articles and books, have been discussed in earlier chapters. Was it really worth while, in order to gain or consolidate a reputation as a vivid and ‘snappy’ journalist, to publish the particular kind of inaccuracy that has disfigured much comment on the Tripoli campaign ; to let credulity wait upon prejudice and bespatter a friendly nation with the resulting slanders ? Fortunately, British opinion has showed a tendency to suspect the anti-Italian writings with which a great part of the press was at one time flooded, but the persistence of false information, long after the British public had made up its mind on the subject, has very naturally been misunderstood by Italy. It is not always easy to realise that comments and criticisms in the press are frequently less the reflection of public opinion than the expression of forces which are seeking to influence public opinion.

England was only partially deceived by the anti-Italian campaign, and there are many Englishmen who feel a keen sense of shame in the thought that the British press should have lent itself so readily to the spread of slanders against the nation which, alone in Europe, declined to believe the similar calumnies published against our own troops at the time of the South African War. It is not accurate to say, what has sometimes been said, that the Italian press gave no shelter at all to the libels which were so carefully and widely circulated at that time. Some regrettable articles

did appear ; but it is a fact that the Italian press displayed a sense of fairness that was almost entirely lacking throughout the rest of Europe, and the overwhelming body of Italian opinion refused to accept the venomous accounts that obtained a ready credence elsewhere. This attitude was the more significant, as there existed in Italy a widespread feeling of sympathy for the Boers. Whatever sympathy for the Turk existed in England, there was no excuse for the readiness to condemn which marked a section of the press and of the public.

The claims of sentiment and of gratitude, the obligations of friendship, a bare sense of ordinary justice—these should have imposed a hesitation upon Italy's critics. And if these made no appeal, one may take other ground, the ground of national interest. It is not a light matter for England, or for the peace of Europe, that Italian confidence in English friendship has been severely shaken, for the moment almost destroyed. There is little comfort in the thought that diplomatic relations remained undisturbed by any misunderstanding or bitterness. The correctness of attitude maintained by both Governments was not enough by itself to stem the currents of misapprehension upon which the two nations were drifting apart. Public opinion in Italy was too deeply wounded, too strongly exacerbated, and it was on public opinion, on unofficial friendly feelings far more than on official friendship, that the special relations between Italy and England ultimately depended.

Italian anger has died down, but a feeling of disillusionment remains, and a mood of bitterness. All over Italy, from north to south, the same comment runs : ‘ We were too ingenuous ; we believed in English friendship.’ It is all very well for an Englishman to answer that we are friendly, that the traditional feeling for Italy has not suffered

eclipse. It is natural that Italians should show some hesitation in believing the assertion. They have a difficulty in understanding the fact that British pacifism and British sentimentalism went quite as far in support of the calumnies directed against the behaviour of the British soldier in South Africa. Nor is it easy for the ordinary Italian to realise that after the first shock of surprise and regret caused by the campaign of the atrocitymongers British opinion slowly righted itself. For a section of the British press continued without interruption, up to the end of the war, to publish 'news' which threw a false light on the situation in Libya, always to Italy's disadvantage.

While England disappointed Italian expectation, the attitude of France came as an agreeable surprise. During the weeks which followed the revolt in the Tripoli oasis and its repression, Italians were justly appreciative of the attitude taken up by the greater part of the French press, which published fair and unbiassed accounts of the action of the Italian troops, in sharp contrast with the grossly distorted versions which appeared in sections of the British, German, and Austrian press. Italy was rightly grateful for this moral support, and for a time the two countries actually seemed to have been drawn closer together by a war which was a source of legitimate preoccupation to the Government responsible for the administration of the greater part of North Africa. In spite of this anxiety, and in spite of some friction between French and Italians in Tunis, where the nearness of the conflict imposed a greater strain, where some Italian tongues wagged too loosely and some French heads displayed a lack of tact, the closer rapprochement between France and Italy emerged as a solitary gain from the welter of

international recriminations which darkened the last months of 1911.

The friendly atmosphere was quickly clouded. As Italian opinion became impatient of the slow progress made in Tripoli, an altogether undue emphasis was laid upon the effect of 'contraband' from Tunis in strengthening the Turco-Arab resistance, and the French authorities were unjustly criticised for a failure to prevent the departure of caravans from the Tunis frontier to the camps which were dotted over the plains of the Jefara. It is not quite clear what Italian journalists would have had the French authorities do, but to judge from some of the comments made, the obligations of neutrality were thought to include the massing of troops along the desert frontier from the sea to beyond Dehibat, and the absolute prohibition of any sort of trade, even in foodstuffs, with the Arabs of Tripoli. It is true that in the early days of the war Turkish officers slipped over the frontier in disguise, but due precautions were taken by the French as soon as this was realised. The difficulties encountered by various *bona fide* correspondents who travelled to the Turkish headquarters via Ben Ghardane, are ample indication of French vigilance.

There was a certain amount of unjustifiable impatience on the part of journalists whose patriotic zeal was not curbed by an acquaintance with the usages of international law, but there was no real jar in the relations between France and Italy until the *Carthage* and *Manouba* incidents kindled a fire of resentment in both countries.

On the night of January 15, 1912, the French mail steamer *Carthage*, en route from Marseilles to Tunis, was stopped some thirty miles off Cape Spartivento by the Italian cruiser *Agordat*, and conveyed to Cagliari in Sardinia, on the ground that she had on board an aeroplane destined

for the Turks. The incident caused a good deal of stir, and a volcanic atmosphere was created with startling suddenness. On January 18, while the air was still full of tension, a second steamer, the *Manouba*, was similarly captured and brought to Cagliari. Unfortunately, the seizure of the *Manouba* was the result of an extraordinary misunderstanding between the French and Italian Governments. The matter was eventually referred for settlement to The Hague, but not until Franco-Italian relations had been seriously prejudiced by the acrimonious discussions which arose.

The Italian authorities had received secret information that the Red Crescent Mission, which was to start from Marseilles in the *Manouba*, included among its personnel several Turkish officers. Acting on this information, the Italian Government, through its Ambassador in Paris, Signor Tittoni, addressed a friendly protest to the French Government. Conversations between M. Poincaré and Signor Tittoni resulted in an agreement that Italy should not interfere in the matter, but that the French authorities in Tunis should hold a thorough investigation on the arrival of the *Manouba*, with the object of ensuring that no one who was not a *bona fide* member of the Mission should be allowed to accompany it across the frontier.

Meanwhile, Italian cruisers had been under orders to stop the *Manouba*, which had left Marseilles, and in the absence of a countermanding telegram, these orders were carried out.

The seizure of the *Manouba*, following upon the detention of the *Carthage*, would in itself have caused irritation in France, but in view of the agreement which had been reached in Paris, the action seemed unaccountable. It is accounted for by the fact that the telegram from the Italian Ambassador announcing the agreement reached its destination too late to permit of communication with the cruisers

detailed to watch the *Manouba*. Many rumours are afloat regarding the explanation of the undue delay which certainly did occur between the settlement of the question at Paris and the communication of that settlement to responsible quarters in Rome, but it is scarcely necessary to enter into these speculations. The important point is that an obvious mistake gave rise to very serious results. While the press of both countries was simmering with excitement and uncertainty, M. Poincaré made a speech which seemed much 'firmer' in tone than the situation demanded; and the French and Italian newspapers boiled over.

It is difficult to see that the incident warranted the wording adopted by M. Poincaré and the anger displayed by the French press. On the other hand, Italy was initially in the wrong, and Italian newspapers, and Italian opinion generally, betrayed too little recognition of the fact. Moreover, there seemed little realisation in Italy of the long strain to which French opinion had been subjected by the crisis of the summer and the subsequent revelations concerning the methods of the Caillaux Government. It was not understood that M. Poincaré's Ministry was under the obligation, above everything, to pursue a 'strong' foreign policy, and that the words which seemed to imply hostility to Italy were primarily intended to reassure France. To put it shortly, neither country was in a mood to make allowances for the other.

Granting that an Italian error was originally responsible for the misunderstanding, and that the peculiar circumstances of the moment imposed upon M. Poincaré the necessity of asserting the French position in Europe, the question still remains: Was it reasonable, and was it judicious, to adopt a tone that was bound to cause resentment in Italy? Italians argue the point on these lines: 'If a

friend does you an injury, you do not threaten him with the processes of the law until you find out whether it was intentional, or whether there is an explanation.' The analogy of the cases may be incomplete, but it is hard to meet the argument that M. Poincaré's speech, and the bitterness of the French press, betokened an attitude which was not that of a friend.

In point of fact, the crisis could never have arisen but for the mutual distrust which still persists between Italy and France. Thanks to the labours of various far-seeing statesmen, the official relations between the two countries had been greatly improved since the beginning of the century ; but there was much to be done in the way of removing the prejudices which had existed for so long, and the *Manouba* incident aroused all the old diffidence.

The *Manouba* incident, and the greatly increased suspicion of French action in Tunis which was a natural result of the ferment created, combined with Italian resentment against the unfairness of British comment to bring about a result which does not seem to have been fully realised in England. Before the war against Turkey, Italian opinion, official and unofficial, recognised that Italy's foreign policy was necessarily conditioned by the division of the other Powers into the two groups—Italy's allies and Italy's friends. The war has changed that view. Italy's allies remain her allies, but Italy has lost confidence in her friends.

As a consequence the whole European situation is definitely, if temporarily, altered. The Mediterranean agreements concluded with France and England in 1902, the steadily improving relations with France, but, above all, the unbroken tradition of cordial friendship with England, had given Italy a position of peculiar significance in international politics. For it was thanks to the special relations

of Italy with the two Western powers of the Triple Entente, and chiefly to Italian intimacy with England, that the six Great Powers of Europe were not separated, three and three, by a hard and fast line that placed them squarely in different camps. It is not too much to say that Italy was in a position to form a connecting-link between the rival groups, and to act as a drag upon any tendency to emphasise the division. Whether Italy had hitherto realised to the full the importance of her position may perhaps be doubted ; but as long as the friendships endured along with the alliances, the very fact had its influence on the European situation. It is particularly unfortunate that the change suffered by Italian relations with England and France should have coincided with the liquidation of the accords of 1902 by the fulfilment of the ends for which they were concluded. No definite engagement kept Italy in touch with the friends whose friendship she had come to doubt, and the shifting of the balance in Europe was thereby assured.

The fact has been quickly demonstrated. In the negotiations and discussions which have exercised Europe since the success of the Balkan Allies ensured a sweeping revision of the map, there has been no more remarkable feature than Italy's support of Austria in demands which are actually contrary to Italian sentiment and Italian interests. Public opinion in Italy recognised the justice of Servia's wish for a port on the Adriatic, realised fully the advantage to Italians of such a trade outlet, and resented the policy which some writers described as letting Italy be 'towed' in the wake of Austria. Italian opinion was strongly in favour of Scutari being given to Montenegro, and the Government's attitude in the matter was not popular. But on neither of these points was public opinion ready to press

the Government too hard, for it was widely believed that the uncertainty of Italy's friendships had imposed upon her the necessity of a closer co-operation with her allies.

The direction of the wind is clearly shown, and there is a danger that in the immediate future the Powers of Europe may be more than ever definitely ranged on opposite shores of an unquiet sea. Fortunately, there are currents which may hinder such a drift, and among them is the necessity of co-operation between England, France and Italy in North Africa. For the present a cordial co-operation may be hampered by the suspicion of France and England which inspires Italian opinion ; and it rests in the main with England to remove that suspicion. The long tradition of friendship between England and Italy has surely entered too deeply into the minds of most Englishmen and most Italians to be permanently broken by the misapprehensions that arise so readily in time of war. But the traditional confidence will only be renewed if England can realise more fully the progress that has enabled Italy to claim her place among the nations. The men who are moulding the Italy of to-morrow feel with some justice that Italian aims and Italian achievements have not been rightly appreciated in England ; and we shall best dispel the lingering clouds if to the old sympathy we can add a new understanding.



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